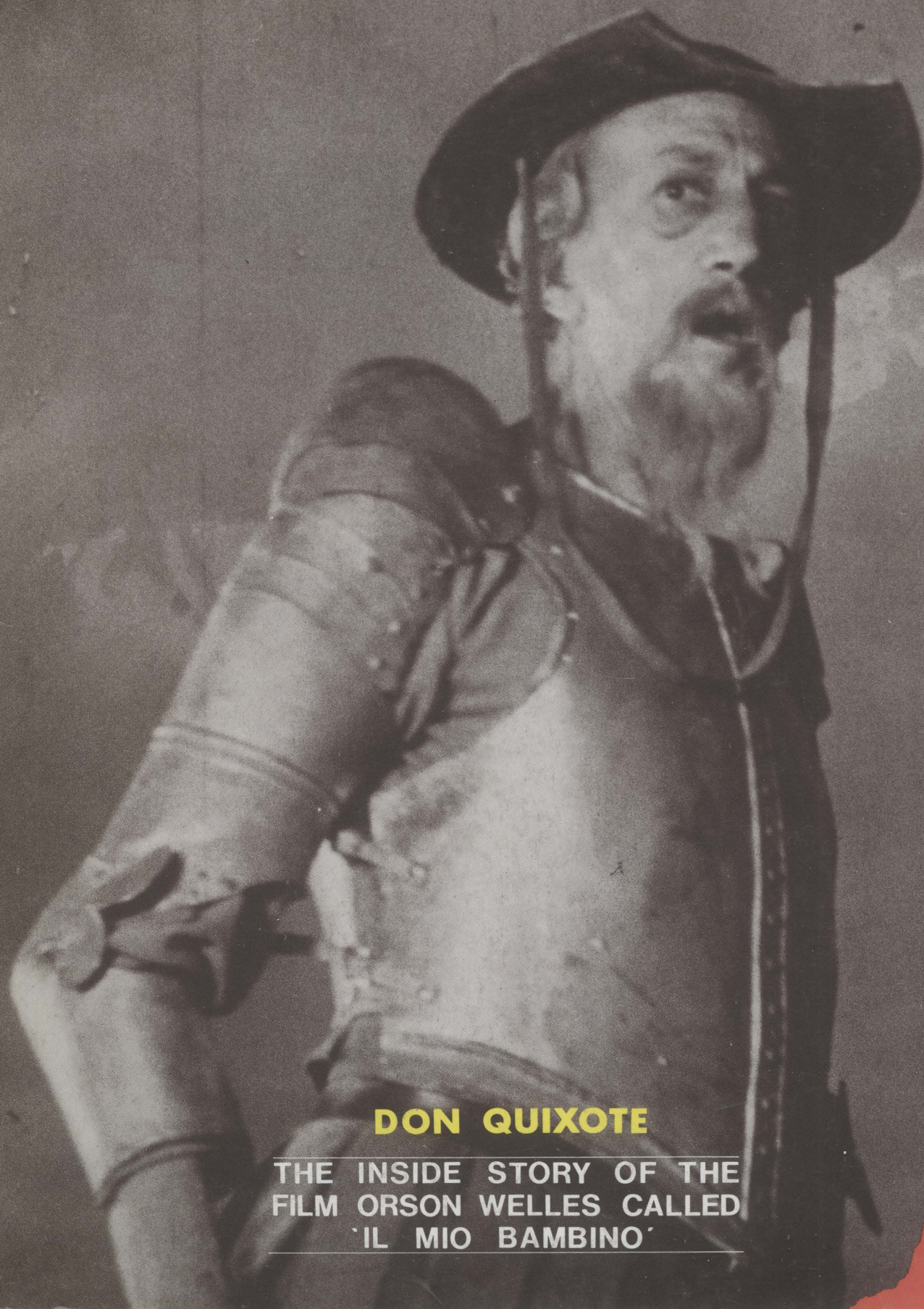


SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · AUTUMN 1988 · £1.80 · \$3.50



DON QUIXOTE

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'IL MIO BAMBINO'

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SIGHT & SOUND

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Jerusalem

'You can invite Mr Gorbachev to Israel'

A mile away in the Old City, Palestinians in the morning had stoned archaeologists digging near their holy shrines, and the Israeli police countered with tear gas and seven arrests. By noon, the confrontation has ebbed, at least for Sunday, 3 July. Thus, the historic outdoors lunch, in the Ben Hinnom Valley below the Jerusalem Cinematheque, could proceed as scheduled.

While a lone policeman stood vigilant with a rifle on a wall above, Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, in jacket and tie, sat down for a catered non-kosher meal and a formal conversation with the first delegation of Soviet film-makers allowed by their government to visit Israel. These included Aleksandr Askoldov and Nonna Morducova, director and star of *Commissar*, and Alexander Chervinsky, screenwriter of *Theme*, both films invited to the Jerusalem Film Festival.

'Peres looks like Elia Kazan's brother,' commented a British producer. 'It's like Nixon playing ping-pong with the Chinese,' an acerbic Israeli journalist said. Still, everyone was amazed and impressed, for the Jerusalem festival had produced a coup with international political implications.

'I have no doubt that Mr Gorbachev knows what we are doing,' Aleksandr Askoldov told Peres. 'I'm going to ask a naive question. Are you thinking of candidates for the first Israeli ambassador to my country?' Although there are no diplomatic ties between the Soviet Union and Israel—not yet—Peres assured him that such discussions were indeed occurring. 'I'd like to raise a toast to this possibility,' Askoldov said excitedly, and led an exuberant clinking of glasses. 'The sooner, the better,' Peres said, and added a few minutes later, almost parenthetically, 'You can invite Mr Gorbachev to Israel.'

Festival director Lia Van Leer, who launched the Israel Film Archives in 1961, is among the few in Jerusalem who remember a cordial relationship with the Soviet film industry. She attended the 1959 Moscow Film Festival. 'But after the Six Day War in 1967, there was no possibility of getting pictures from the Soviet Union, or from Hungary, Poland, or other Eastern countries.'

The five-year-old Jerusalem Festival has proved a major venue for a thaw with the Eastern bloc, in part because of its reputation for showing Third



Soviet screenwriter Alexander Chervinsky and Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

World cinema. That includes, when available to it, the work of Arab film-makers. Also, the festival is staffed predominantly, and quite openly, by 'softliners' on Palestinian sovereignty. So the Hungarians, Poles and Yugoslavs have sent films to Jerusalem. This year was the Soviet Union's time.

'For several years, Mrs Van Leer had invited Soviet film-makers,' Alexander Chervinsky explained. 'This year, Andrey Smirnov, Acting Secretary of the Union of Soviet Film-makers, struggled for it. He insisted at the Foreign Ministry that there must be a delegation. He said that it is the policy of our union to enlarge the showings of Soviet film-makers everywhere. In Israel, there are a lot of people speaking Russian. Also, it's a film market. There's money.'

Chervinsky, who is Jewish, experienced the Brezhnev policies at first-hand. In part because his screenplay for *Theme* included a subplot about an unhappy Russian emigrating to Israel, the 1979 film was never released. Because his sister and brother-in-law had emigrated to America, Chervinsky was kept from travelling abroad. 'In Brezhnev's time, a character in a film could be Jewish, but only in a very specific way,' Chervinsky said. 'He could be in the war, very bold and brave, and die while everyone lives. Or he could be a friendly, funny Jew. I don't have to tell you—it's the same as black people in American movies.'

Chervinsky plans to confront Soviet anti-semitism, past and present, with a script based on fact about the rigged trial of Jewish doctors at the beginning of the 1950s, just before Stalin's death. He also has a comedy

script in mind, to be made in English for an American company, about the friendship of a Russian truckdriver from Eastern Siberia and a Jewish American lawyer.

A last delicate question: have things changed so much that there are no secret spies in the six-strong Soviet group? 'The first few days I thought about it a lot,' Chervinsky confessed. 'I always thought a delegation had an "official" man. But they said at home, "The official man is you: the head of the delegation." I nearly fainted when I heard it. I've never headed anything in my life and I don't know the official point of view.'

The Russians who were in Jerusalem struggle to escape the aesthetics of Stalinism. The Israeli film-makers who showed new features (*The Owl*, *Avanti Popolo*, *Shell Shock*, etc) remain oddly committed to a melodramatic social realism not unlike that favoured during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. Preoccupied by the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian situation, young directors make one 'message' film after another advocating an end to the conflict. A genuinely noble cause calls forth, unfortunately, noble speech-making, and the films are packed with meaningful pacifist soliloquies, delivered by overwrought stage actors-turned-film actors.

Of course, there is a long and honourable Jewish tradition of 'shtick', of arm-waving, heart-pounding, eyes-bulging, from Yiddish theatre. And Israelis in life rarely hold anything back, so why shouldn't the films reflect the blunt, uninhibited nature of the populace? Still, Israelis realise that there has been a problem making an impact abroad

with their didactic films. Everyone agrees: more subtlety is required from the actors, and Israeli directors must learn to tell their stories visually.

The two best Israeli films dealt with the issues of how the Holocaust has shadowed the next generation. *Due to That War* is a feature-length documentary made by Orna Ben Dor Niv about Israeli rock stars Yehudie Poliker and Yaakov Gilead, each of whom has a parent affected by time in a concentration camp.

But *Due to That War* is a film of hope. Gilead's mother, an author and lecturer on the Holocaust, has written down the story of Poliker's father. As oral history, it won't be forgotten, and he won't have to tell it every day. And Poliker and Gilead have extended their repertoire to include haunting songs of the Holocaust. The concert footage is reason enough for *Due to That War* to be shown internationally. Here are twin Leonard Cohens, and with giant troubadour voices.

The Summer of Aviya is based on Gila Almagor's memoir of her post-Second World War Israeli childhood, living with a mother suffering the demons of years on the run as a Jewish partisan in Poland. Her mother acts erratically, anti-socially, and has periodic nervous breakdowns. Finally, she is taken away to a hospital forever. In the film, Almagor acts the part of her mother without sentimentalising the memory, and Israel of 1949, in its first years of independence, is created in loving detail by director Eli Cohen. Appropriately, *The Summer of Aviya* was saved for the closing night. It's the best dramatic film from Israel in 1988.

GERALD PEARY

La Rochelle

Silent glories from Borzage and Tourjansky

Razed by Richelieu, and now a popular resort for holiday-makers seeking the ultimate in seafood, La Rochelle has for the past sixteen years hosted one of France's best film festivals. The prime mover behind the event is Jean-Loup Passek, whose astonishing workload includes not just this festival but also the programming (and superb publications) at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, plus the movie dictionaries put out by Larousse.

La Rochelle, Passek says, serves as a bridge between the cinema's past and future, and in these days when festivals proliferate like mushrooms it's certainly hard to find a theme that withstands scrutiny. This summer the focus was on half-a-dozen directors: Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Stephen Frears, Dušan Makavejev, Gleb Panfilov, Krzysztof Kieślowski and James B. Harris. The miracle is that Passek inveigles each of his subjects to attend the festival, as well as managing to round up even obscure items such as Frears' 1977 rrv 'Playhouse' entry, *Last Summer*, and Panfilov's first feature, *No Way Through the Fire* (1968).

Still, the silents reigned supreme at La Rochelle this July. A particularly tantalising revelation came from the Luxembourg Cinémathèque: Frank Borzage's *The River* (1929). Truncated, and with some scenes blurred and blotted by time, this looked astonishingly modern by comparison with the stilted performances in so many of the other silents on view. Of course most American productions had opted for sound by 1929, but the playing of Charles Farrell and Mary Duncan is so intense and yet so relaxed that one can relish the barely disguised passion as the pair try to stay out of each other's arms while waiting for the husband to return to the railhead.

In more pristine condition, Victor Tourjansky's *Le Chant de l'Amour Triomphant* (1923) was unveiled in a splendid tinted print. Tourjansky may well be best known to British enthusiasts as Gance's assistant director on *Napoléon*, but this film alone deserves to change some of the dictionary entries ('mostly routine', says Ephraim Katz, for example, referring to Tourjansky's work as an émigré in France after he had fled the October Revolution). Panfilov must have felt a certain twinge of nostalgia had he arrived in time to see *Le Chant*, for both he

and Tourjansky achieved their best work when casting their wives in leading roles. The film is no more than a graceful triangle drama (perhaps even drama is too vulgar a word); its charm lies in the crystalline delicacy and restraint of the images, as though Tourjansky were somehow a forerunner of Bresson, bestowing grace on everyone in sight.

A terrible majority of the eighty-odd films shot by Sjöström and Stiller in Sweden during the 1910s was lost in fires and floods, and it was only in June last year that a print of Stiller's *Wings* (1916) came to light in Norway. Abetted by a witty prologue and epilogue, made up of stills and comments from Stiller's own production notes, the Swedish Film Institute has restored this copy to something of its former glory. What makes *Wings* so fascinating is that it was inspired by the same Herman Bang novel on which Dreyer based *Mikaël* when he was working in Germany in 1924. For anyone into codes, of course, it's clear that Stiller saw the story of the handsome young artist and his eminent mentor as a homosexual situation, and the title of the film comes from a sculpture by Carl Milles showing a youth being borne off by an eagle—an icon for the abduction of the beautiful Ganymede by Zeus.

The festival turned up other rewarding treasures, such as

Holger-Madsen's *Ship to Heaven* (*Himmelskibet*), made in 1918 and remarkable for its pacifist message and its almost subversive rejection of bourgeois values in the Scandinavia of the silent period. Boasting some crowd scenes (Martians in flowing white robes) to match *Things to Come*, this Danish feature-length production approaches its science-fiction theme with none of Lang's sombreness. Perhaps 70 years on one takes its naive message with just a little less condescension than one does the Danish silent version of *David Copperfield* (1922), directed by Anders Wilhelm Sandberg and also screened at La Rochelle.

PETER COWIE

Wellesian

Quixote in a trashcan

'I earn a good living and get a lot of work because of this ridiculous myth about me,' Orson Welles told Kenneth Tynan in the mid-60s. 'But the price of it is that when I try to do something serious, something I care about, a great many critics don't review that particular work, but me in general. They write their standard Welles piece. It's either the good piece or the bad piece, but they're both fairly standard.'

Standard Welles pieces were for once not the main bill of fare at a major Welles retrospective and conference held last May

at New York University and the Public Theater. A welcome amount of concrete research into Welles' work in radio, theatre and film was aired, along with the obligatory theoretical exercises. Sidebars included an extensive exhibition of Welles' radio shows and materials documenting stage productions, and an effectively staged reading of *Moby Dick Rehearsed*, a prime instance of how Wellesian magic could be conjured out of suggestively minimal sounds and images.

In his keynote address, James Naremore offered some fascinating glimpses into the Welles archive in Bloomington, Indiana. The original version of *The Stranger* was half an hour longer, with a flashback structure, a surreal early scene set on a dog-training farm in Argentina and a nightmarish dream sequence. Even more tantalising was the description of the original design of *The Lady from Shanghai*, based on a 1947 cutting continuity of a pre-release version that was about an hour longer. Among many finds: Michael O'Hara's first encounter with Elsa Bannister in Central Park was depicted in a lengthy camera movement charting the separate trajectories of both characters and a cruising police car, similar to the opening shot of *Touch of Evil*.

Some papers concentrated on lesser-known aspects of the Welles oeuvre. William Simon, the conference organiser, focused on two wartime propaganda radio series, *Hello Americans* and *Ceiling Unlimited*, which used some of the pseudo-documentary techniques of *Julius Caesar* on stage, *The War of the Worlds* on radio and the *Kane* newsreel, and anticipated such essay films as *F for Fake*. Andrea Nouryeh gave a detailed description of the 1941 stage adaptation of *Native Son*, which featured the Rosebud sled among the props in the Thomas tenement flat, and had Bigger Thomas firing a gun into the audience as actors dressed as policemen proceeded to the stage from the balcony.

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of reinterpretation based on fresh information came from Robert Stam's account of the ill-fated *It's All True*. Drawing on an array of Hollywood and Brazilian documents, including the research conducted and commissioned by Welles at the time, Stam persuasively argued that most of the complaints about Welles' profligacy in Brazil can be attributed to his radical pro-black stance, including the fact that he enjoyed the company and collaboration of blacks, as well as his insistence on featuring non-whites as the

Science fiction from 1918: *Himmelskibet*.



pivotal characters in both the film's Brazilian episodes. Stam also examined how 'in his interest in the northeast, in the *cangaceiros* (rebel bandits), in millennial cults, in popular culture and rebellion, Welles managed to anticipate many of the themes subsequently taken up by Brazilian Cinema Novo in the 60s and after.' Indeed, the Brazilian government recently voted to finance the feature about *It's All True* that is being planned by Richard Wilson, Welles' assistant in Brazil, including Wilson's reconstruction of the remarkable Fortaleza episode.

The climax of the weekend was Oja Kodar's screening of excerpts from four unfinished or unreleased films—an event that was well attended, although oddly enough not by many of the conference's more prominent academics. There was a short scene from *The Dreamers*, already discussed in these pages (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1986), and one reel of *The Merchant of Venice*. This is a provocative sample—fully edited, scored and mixed—of a finished film whose soundtrack was stolen in Rome in 1969, soon after the film was completed, for reasons that remain mysterious. (Kodar possesses the complete negative, but without sound, apart from this reel.) Featuring Welles as a heavily made-up Shylock, a spectacular array of festively decorated boats and a use of colour that is distinctly different from that of *The Immortal Story* (with gold predominating in the harbour), the reel is too fragmentary to constitute more than a teaser.

The three reels from *The Other Side of the Wind* offered three complete scenes. Earlier versions of the first two were shown at Welles' 1975 AFI Tribute, and are described in James Naremore's *The Magical World of Orson Welles*. The third charts an unsettling series of exchanges between director Jake Hannaford (John Huston), surrounded by members of his entourage at his birthday party, and a prissy schoolteacher (Dan Tobin), clearly out of his depth, whose former student is the lead actor in Hannaford's film-in-progress. Hannaford's banter is basically macho gay-baiting, and the musically timed reverse-angles which alternate between his gibes and the teacher's embarrassed rejoinders or giggles finally give way to simple exchanges of looks. Relentlessly prolonging and exacerbating the queasy tension, this sequence is the most aggressive employment that I know of *champ contrechamp*.

But the major revelation was the four reels of *Don Quixote*.

This series of fully edited but only partially dubbed black and white sequences, in no apparent order, already provides strong evidence of why Welles never wanted to let go of the film: it is so fully Welles and Cervantes at the same time, and so close to the wellsprings of his inspiration, that it must have served as his ultimate plaything. Completion would only have put an end to the game.

The materials at hand are simple and unadorned: Quixote (Francisco Reiguera) and Sancho Panza (Akim Tamiroff), both in ragtag period costume, and contemporary Spain all around them. When they pass through a town, with crowds waving, the continuing relevance of Quixote is ironically underlined by the presence of his name on shop signs and billboards, including one for Quixote Beer. The rural landscapes are worthy of Dovzhenko, with a similar dominance of sculpted sky over ground. There are no sound effects. When voices are heard, they belong exclusively to Welles—as both his characters and in one sequence as himself off screen, addressing a querulous Sancho, who speaks back to the camera.

The interplay between master and servant is perhaps most hilariously expressed in a scene on a city rooftop, where Sancho is washing his master in a trash-can next to a TV aerial, calmly soaping and scrubbing Quixote's

arms while they wildly gesticulate in the midst of nonstop pontifications. The earthiness and physicality of the characterisation parallels that of Falstaff, reminding one of the paradox that Welles' most personal work came in literary adaptations—Tarkington, Shakespeare, Dinesen—rather than in original scripts such as *Kane* and *Arkadin*.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

African cinema

A view from Ghana

Victor Anti—who used to sell Guinness in Dublin—is now, as commercial director, trying to sell films for the Ghana Film Industry Corporation. Faced with a shortage of money and a fragmented audience, African cinema, he believes, faces a hard, uphill road. Money must be spent on publicity from the start of production, on well-produced books for exhibitors, on posters. Here, Ghana does not really compete with American, European and Indian filmmakers. The posters for the German-Ghanaian *Cobra Verde*, for instance, were all in German. No one could read them.

Then there is the question of language. *I Told You So* was in Twi, which is only spoken in a small area. Will you get a quick return on your money in such an

area? You can dub it into Ewe and Ga, or subtitle it. But how many people can read Ewe? How successful can you be in Nigeria, Kenya or Zimbabwe? If you had filmed it in English, a lot of the humour would have been lost. With English, you have a wider educated audience, but you cut off the illiterate and half-educated. Cultures differ. In Ghana, people hiss to attract the attention of others. In Ethiopia, they don't. Tastes differ, too. *'Man from Africa'* was a flop in Kumasi. In Accra, we had to run it for four months.'

Politics also play their part. 'Scripts have to be agreed by the government in your country, which leads to self-censorship, which leads to stories that aren't interesting and therefore can't sell. You go to the bank for a loan. Nobody knows you. Or you try the Ministry of Finance. Your story is good, but people are dying and we have to build houses. Come back next year.'

'What is an African film? A film made by Africans or a film set in Africa? The African producer faces a dilemma: does he tell the story he wants, or the one everyone else is telling? He approaches an outside financier who says, "I'll give money, but only if you change it." In the end, very often you find your product is unacceptable in Africa.'

African producers are offered derisory sums for their films in Britain and America. 'Moscow is the same. They wanted *Love Brewed in an African Pot*. They wanted to pay nothing... Then there's piracy. If you aren't careful and you have to rely on outside colour laboratories, you can find two copies of your film circulating in a market you want to exploit.' And again protectionism. For a film to be shown in India, it has to have been in an award contest and been well reviewed in the right journals; and the producer must deposit \$15,000 with a government agency.

There are African film festivals at Ouagadougou, Carthage and Mogadishu, though attendant film-makers often appear more interested in awards than in selling their pictures, most of which in any case are documentaries. French-speaking Africans got into film-making before English-speaking; and many worked in the French film industry. Victor Anti suspects them of running a cartel. *'Ghana Reborn'* should have won at Ouagadougou, but the judges were all from French-speaking countries. They decided not to consider a political film. Perhaps the English-speaking countries should co-ordinate their own efforts.

DAVID SPARK

Orson Welles rehearsing *Moby Dick* in London.
Photo: Russell Westwood.





Jacques Ledoux.

Jacques Ledoux

Memories of an extraordinary archivist

I think it must have been the spectacles with their thick lenses which made Jacques Ledoux have such a hypnotic effect on anyone who met him. He peered at you and you always felt he was disagreeing with everything you said. Alas, he will do that no more. Jacques, who had been Curator of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique since 1948, died in Brussels on 6 June.

Jacques nearly lost his life in the war, but managed to jump off the train that was taking him and his family to almost certain death and hide with the Bossiroy family in Sorinne-la-Longue. It was some time during this period that he found his first film, a 35mm print of *Nanook of the North* which was lying in the cellars of a Belgian abbey. I remember his excitement when he learnt that this copy had formed the basis of the recently restored version.

He had broad tastes and many enthusiasms. *Napoléon* would never have been restored if he had not used his popularity as Secretary General of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF)—a post he held for nearly seventeen years—to persuade colleagues all over the world to send all the material they held on Abel Gance's film to the National Film Archive in London so that Kevin Brownlow could make his selection. Such co-operation was unknown at the time and has seldom been equalled since.

Then there was his love of the experimental film. I remember spending several Christmas days on the Dover/Ostend ferry and then taking the tram to Knokke-le-Zoute. Who else would have started a film festival on Boxing Day? There in the Casino with

the Magrittes looking down on us we saw Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, Gregory Markopoulos' beautiful *Twice a Man* and Andy Warhol's *Sleep*; the latter screened during a New Year's Eve party. Although it seemed unlikely at the time, many of the techniques and ideas presented at Knokke have since influenced mainstream cinema. Jacques also instituted the annual Ciné-découvertes, and the Prix L'Age d'Or which was given to a contemporary film-maker who showed creative independence.

He was stubborn and outspoken. He expected his staff to work the same long hours as he did. He was sad in later years to find that his was the only light on at midnight. His cinema museum was the first to cover the pre-history of the cinema chronologically and comprehensively and to recognise the importance of public participation in the experience. There were lots of buttons and everything moved.

As Secretary General of FIAF he fought for autonomy. Curators must be able to decide the policies of their archives and how to spend the money allocated. Only the curators should attend FIAF meetings because only they had the knowledge to further the development of the film archive movement. It was after a confrontation with a previous director of the British Film Institute that he introduced the reconfirmation of members. Every five years they still have to prove that there have been no organisational changes which might affect their ability to run their archives without interference.

Alas, it was just such a per-

ceived change that led to his resignation as Secretary General. His views were right, but times were changing and it was difficult for FIAF to remain a tightly knit club.

After that, Jacques kept a low profile and continued the range of excellent publications which started with the Confrontation catalogue. This was a report on the twelve best films of all time chosen at the 1958 Brussels Exhibition. Just before his death, he produced a catalogue of all silent films in members' collections. True to form, it was only available for consultation by the staff of archives who had participated in the project.

Controversial to the end, he made a startling intervention at the FIAF 50th Anniversary Congress in Paris without being present. As usual the timing was impeccable and the effect devastating. However, Jacques will be remembered by archivists and film-makers alike as someone who cared about cinema and fought for his beliefs. He certainly deserved the Erasmus Prize. Thanks to him, Belgium has the best collection of classic feature films in the world.

Only two questions remain unanswered. Where did Jacques live? And what happened to the vintage cars in the basement of the Palais des Beaux Arts which he was always going to restore? I will probably never find out because even his best friends knew little of his personal life. It was therefore no surprise that he decided not to tell anyone about the seriousness of his illness and requested that he should be buried before the news of his death was released.

DAVID FRANCIS

Big Money.



Czech list

This year in Karlovy Vary

Recently there has been talk of a 'renaissance' in Czechoslovak film-making. Karel Smyczek's study of football hooligans, *Why?*, even provoking the *Guardian* correspondent to evoke the 'new wave' of the 60s. This year's Karlovy Vary festival suggested that, although there is as yet no renaissance, there are certainly some interesting developments.

The most obvious production change has been an attempt to confront social realities and move away from the Socialist Realist fairy tales of recent years. Thus there have been films about corruption and racketeering (*Big Money*), hooliganism (*Why?*), drug addiction (*The Cobweb*), family relations (*Antony's Chance*, *Sensitive Spots*) and alienation (*A House for Two*). Not so radical, perhaps, but a few years ago the subjects would either have been taboo or treated as exceptional cases.

The sensation of the moment is Vít Olmer's *Big Money* (the untranslatable Czech original is *Bony a klid*, with an intended reference to *Bonnie and Clyde*). The subject is illegal currency dealing, where at least two Mafia-type gangs apparently operate. The story is fairly predictable—a young boy gets involved on the fringes of the game and is drawn into the big time of a life that leads to tragedy and prison. Vít Olmer, a former leading actor, and his cinematographer, Ota Kopřiva, have in recent years specialised in a mix of

social themes with a visual style and use of music that owes a lot to western models. With *Big Money* all the stops are pulled out—breakneck speed, inventive camerawork, sex scenes that go further than anything previously seen on Czech screens, plus the relentless drive of Frankie Goes to Hollywood on the soundtrack. It does initially tend to glamorise its corrupt world, but the conclusion is suitably chastening.

The film was co-scripted by the journalist Radek John, who was also a prime mover in Karel Smyczek's story of soccer hooliganism, *Why?*. Based on an incident when supporters of the Sparta football club demolished a train on their way to Slovakia, the film is notable not only for dealing with a previously taboo subject but also for its unusually questioning approach. The most noticeable thing about the teenagers is their essential ordinariness, and this often violent film has perhaps inevitably gained a following among the hooligans themselves. Both *Big Money* and *Why?* tread a tightrope between the need to connect, the need to shock and the need to moralise. In a society where debate on such issues has been stifled, the desire to shock is understandable and a necessary function.

The impulses behind *Big Money* and *Why?* are strongly journalistic and sociological. Vladimír Drha's *Sensitive Spots* and Milos Zábanský's *A House for Two* concentrate more on individuals and the effect of social conditions. Drha made an impact with his *A New Boy Started Today* (1981), which exposed petty intrigues in factory life. Unfortunately, *Sensitive Spots*, the study of the relationship between a single parent and her daughter, who has an illegitimate child, has nothing like the same bite. A fairly predictable plot is enlivened by a striking central performance from Jana Brejchová, who first came to attention in Weiss's *The Wolf Trap* and Jasný's *Desire* in the late 1950s.

A House for Two is really the most impressive of the films, and concerns itself with the relationship between two brothers. The younger engages in a macho life style that leads to the pregnancy of his girlfriend. Guided by a strong Christian morality, the elder brother marries her, but the younger returns to precipitate a tragic conclusion. While the situation is not new, the film is made with considerable sophistication. Perhaps most effective, however, is the sense of context—a world of routine and limited horizons conveyed not only through repeated images (of cogwheels, walking feet) but through the use of landscape and

environment. The 'art cinema' symbolism may offend some, but it also serves to lift the film to another level. Zábanský is clearly a director to watch.

Another film attracting current attention is Vera Chytilová's *The Jester and the Queen*. Based on a mime play by Boleslav Polívka, it features both himself and his wife, Chantal Poulain. Chytilová has adapted the play, adding a modern parallel, together with modernist music and some typically disjunctive camerawork from Jan Malíř. Chytilová is still one of the most inventive film-makers around, and here she makes some interesting juxtapositions—master/servant, male/female, past/present, theatre/cinema—that intriguingly extend the bounds of conventional narrative. It may not be a total success, but this viewer was sufficiently hooked to want to see it again (preferably with a clearer guide to the intricacies of the dialogue).

The most unusual discovery at Karlovy Vary was Drahomíra Vihanová's *Deadly Sunday*, shown in a group of women's films under the auspices of KIW (Kino Women International). Vihanová made the film in 1969 when it and many others found themselves 'on the shelf'. Since then, she has worked in documentary and the film has never been screened until now. In some ways, it's a typical 60s art movie. The study of the subjective life of an army officer entrusted with civil defence and a traumatic Sunday ending in suicide is undeniably pessimistic, but it's full of the kind of inventiveness that's rare in contemporary cinema. A pity that mainstream film has taken a less flexible path, but also that Vihanová's talent has never been let loose on another feature.

There is inevitable speculation as to whether some of the thirty or so other films on the blacklist may emerge. Major works by Menzel, Jirěš, Jasný, Němec, Jakubisko and Schorm are included, some dating back to as early as 1964. The purpose of maintaining such a ban seems even less clear, considering the changes in East-West relations and the lead given by the Soviet Union in taking its own films off the shelf.

Interestingly enough, the Festival Daily seemed to indicate a changed attitude to the history of Czechoslovak cinema. The 60s was seen as a period of international and artistic success compared with the stultifying simplicities of the 70s (euphemistically described as 'a lull'). Names and films that a few years ago would not even have been mentioned have been re-

inserted into history with what almost looks like approval. A piece on current production by the director of the Barrandov Film Studios, Jaroslav Gürtler, was also refreshingly self-critical.

One other piece of information: Evald Schorm has completed his first feature since 1969, reuniting Jana Brejchová and Jan Kacer, the stars of his 60s successes, *Everyday Courage* and *Return of the Prodigal Son*.

PETER HAMES



Charlie Parker.

Lullabies of Birdland

Three films about Charlie Parker

The mixed feelings of anticipation and dread felt by the world's jazz devotees at the knowledge that someone somewhere would one day attempt to film Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker's life story can finally find expression. It has taken 33 years since the musician's death, but now, in the space of a few months, we have not one but three film biographies.

During the course of Celluloid Dealers' evocative drama-doc *Bird Now*, the amiable filmmaker Bruce Ricker (*The Last of the Blue Devils*) suggests that the scarcity of film footage on Parker sets insurmountable problems for the potential biographer. But this handicap can be overcome, as witness such splendid productions as Brigitte Berman's *Bix: Ain't None of Them Play Like Him Yet* and Jonas Sima's *Ake Hasselgård Story* for which the film-makers only had access to literally a few seconds of silent footage on their subjects. No, probably the reason is more complex: courage and

commitment from a film-maker have a lot to do with it, as have finance, literary, music and recording copyrights and, for a production such as Clint Eastwood's *Bird*, evolution of the requisite technology without which Lennie Niehaus' brilliant music tracks would not have been possible.

Not that Parker has been totally absent from our screens. Two sections of actuality footage are reasonably well known, having been used extensively in film and TV productions over the years. The first, dating from 1950, was shot by *Life* photographer Gjon Mili (he of *Jammin' the Blues* fame) for impresario Norman Granz—though its soundtrack has long been lost. Then in 1951 Parker appeared with Dizzy Gillespie on US television to receive Downbeat Awards and to play one number together, *Hot House*. Fortunately a kinescope was preserved. 1966 brought us Herbert Danks's feature *Sweet Love, Bitter* (aka *It Won't Rub Off, Baby*), an adaptation of John Williams' novel *Night Song* seemingly inspired, at least in part, by Parker's death. Interestingly, the sax solos in this film were soundtracked by Charles McPherson, whose style is so close to Parker's that he was chosen to play on several tracks for Eastwood's movie. Parallels with Parker and use of his music are also apparent in Ernesto Rimoch's *Mask* (1981), based on *El Perseguidor* by Julio Cortázar—an impression of a black alto sax player as seen by his biographer.

The respected American critic Gary Giddins has now produced *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker* (1987), an audio-visual expression of his recent book, made for TV and video release. It is crammed with information about Parker, using interviews, archive footage, stills and music all strictly to formula. More imaginative, though not without faults, is *Bird Now* (1987), a genuine labour of love for producer Hengameh Panahi and her director Marc Huraux, who have bravely attempted to combine documentary material and music with fictionalised sequences to reminisce on Parker's relationship with the city of New York. This will be shown soon by Channel 4, whose own project on the musician, being prepared by Horace Ové, must now be in doubt.

Clint Eastwood's epic, romanticised impression of the tortured musical genius who was Charlie Parker will be shown at the London Film Festival, as will *Bird Now*. Despite or perhaps because of this current surfeit of riches, *Bird* lives!

DAVID MEEKER



A Fish Called Wanda: Jamie Lee Curtis and Kevin Kline.

Edinburgh

Japanese style and South African authenticity

This year's Edinburgh Festival, the 42nd of that ilk, was not adjudged a particularly memorable one by some of the Scottish press, but succeeded in spite of that in attracting record attendances. Topped and tailed by two new British films—Jim O'Brien's *The Dressmaker*, taken from the Beryl Bainbridge novel set in wartime Liverpool, and Philip Saville's *The Fruit Machine*, written by Frank Clarke and set in the same city—the programme could be said to look more and more like that of any other non-competitive festival which gathers its wares from Cannes, Berlin and the like. Actually, of course, Edinburgh isn't quite like any other festival, since it gives so many slots to unheralded film-makers, and thus chances its arm much more than most.

One way it did so this year was to mount no less than thirteen films by the Japanese director Seijun Suzuki, virtually unknown outside Japan and on his first visit to Europe without a word of English. It was a risk worth taking. But it didn't quite come off in the eyes of most of those who saw the films, or tried to interview the very cheerful and charming gentleman in question through an interpreter. He blocked most questions as if he were Boycott determined not to get out on the first morning of a particularly vital Test Match.

Suzuki has by all accounts become a bit of a cult director in Japan, having specialised for many years in commercial thrill-

lers, often quite liberally laced with erotica and violence. And he certainly has the kind of style you notice. But the content of these films does not seem particularly interesting, except as a kind of swingeing counterblast to a traditional culture which his young supporters decry. And one or two of his more serious films on display are not very impressive at all.

What one needed, as well as the fulsome programme notes suggesting that Suzuki was the Sams Fuller and Peckinpah rolled into one, with a touch of Godard and possibly Fellini to boot, was something from the director himself. This he was wary of giving, content to let us see the films and judge for ourselves. There is undoubtedly more to him than meets the eye. But it was never really vouchsafed to us.

The more popular retrospective was accorded to Charles Crichton, whose *A Fish Called Wanda*, written by John Cleese, was one of the centrepieces of the festival. You can't go wrong with *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Titfield Thunderbolt*—films which expressed something about their time, which *A Fish Called Wanda* has rather more difficulty doing. But the new film, a small sensation in America, was also a big success in Edinburgh, where Crichton and Cleese were in attendance doing so many interviews that even the BBC World Service was at first refused the honour of ten minutes with one or other. Crichton, now 78, held up as well under the strain of all this as he does in directing the film, which, though far from flawless, has the same comic energy and zest for character-drawing that

has distinguished most of his work.

Of the other British films, *The Dressmaker* looked a bit television-bound but was at least beautifully acted, and *The Fruit Machine* had a cinematic exuberance one would expect from Saville and Clarke. But neither came near the style and emotional force of Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, winner of the International Critics prize at Cannes and joint winner of the Locarno Festival.

Three films, in particular, seemed to lift themselves a little above the general run of successes already noted at other festivals. The cheapest and probably the most difficult to make was undoubtedly Oliver Schmitz's *Mapantsula* from South Africa. Schmitz is white and of German origin; the writer and star, Thomas Mogotlane, is black. And this story about an uneducated petty thief living in a typical township underlines the lessons learnt from *Cry Freedom* and *A World Apart* with great authenticity. Though occasionally betraying the dangers and corner-cutting of its making, it is a surprisingly complex work, which goes straight to the heart of things without dollops of liberal sentiment to sustain it and underline it.

Nick Broomfield's latest documentary, *Driving Me Crazy*, was also a bit of a revelation, though a determinedly cheerful one in the circumstances. Engaged to make a film about the making of a mammoth stage musical designed to celebrate black performance, Broomfield found himself faced, in the middle of it all, with a screenplay writer hired to make a fiction out of reality. It was not as if reality were not dramatic enough, since the musical, though eventually a triumph called *Body and Soul* (at least in Germany), was

fraught with trouble from the beginning. Of the three choreographers involved, one threatens suicide, the second is struck on the head by a camera and the third assaults Broomfield's crew. The result of all this is, of course, a bit of a shambles. But it is a very funny one, which says a lot about show-business in both its theatrical and film forms and once again marks Broomfield as a director who generally gets himself into trouble and then extricates himself through sheer obstinate doggedness. *Driving Me Crazy* is a unique little film on a good many counts.

Finally, from Hollywood came Martin Brest's comic road movie *Midnight Run*, with Robert De Niro and Charles Grodin in the leads as ex-policeman bounty hunter and accountant embezzler respectively. The former spends most of the film trying to take the latter from New York to Los Angeles to face justice, but begins to like him a little too well for comfort. The odyssey of this decidedly odd couple is very well written (George Gallo) and acted with some virtuosity. In particular, the film contains some of the most eloquent bad language I have ever heard. In these days of otiose big-budget movies from America, like Michael Cimino's unutterably boring *The Sicilian*, put on as a surprise extra, it is nice to see such a good little film surfacing, even though it is clearly about ten minutes too long.

All in all, the Festival, though clearly beginning to look as though its chronic shortage of grant-aid is preventing it progressing further along the road towards new ideas, was a credit to Jim Hickey, its director. You can only do so much if you are counting every penny, and he did most of it.

DEREK MALCOLM

Seijun Suzuki's *Gate of Flesh*.



FIGURING THE MESSAGE

ALAN STANBROOK analyses a Business Ratio Report and discovers Britain's most efficient film-maker

The only thing wrong with a column of figures is that people, on the whole, do not know how to read them. Balance sheets and profit and loss accounts tend to make eyes glaze over because the man in the street doesn't know where to begin to make sense of them. I've just come across something that is almost all figures, however, and it's one of the most intriguing things I've read in a long while. I think, when you get the hang of it, you would find it interesting too.

It's published by icc Business Ratios, a division of the icc Information Group, and costs a daunting £165. It gives a detailed breakdown of all the figures and ratios that enable you to understand the business of film and television. What it amounts to is a sector analysis of film and television producers and distributors, and I can't think there'll be anybody in the trade who hasn't already bought or ordered a copy.

Lest you take me for a pedant, let me tell you, by way of an appetiser, some of the instructive things you can glean from it. You can tell, for example, if you know the right ratios to look at, which film-maker is by far the most efficient in Britain. You can tell who is likely to pay you the most money if you are looking for a job in the entertainment field. You can see all too clearly why Goldcrest went down for the count and had to be bailed out by the Brent Walker group. And that in turn tells you the warning signs to look for in other companies. Isn't that worth getting a little numerate for?

One of the things that is at first rather difficult to grasp is that sheer size, in terms of sales or even profits, is not necessarily a sign that all is well with a company. You have to look at how easy or difficult it was for the company to make that profit—in other words how efficient it is. And, even more, you have to look at how simple it would be for its profits to be wiped out by a relatively small change in business circumstances.

Before looking at any specific examples, see how easily this can happen. It's governed by something that in financial circles goes by the name of gearing. In effect, this is a little arithmetical quirk which means that if you have borrowed a lot of money and your sales fall sharply, your profits will fall even more

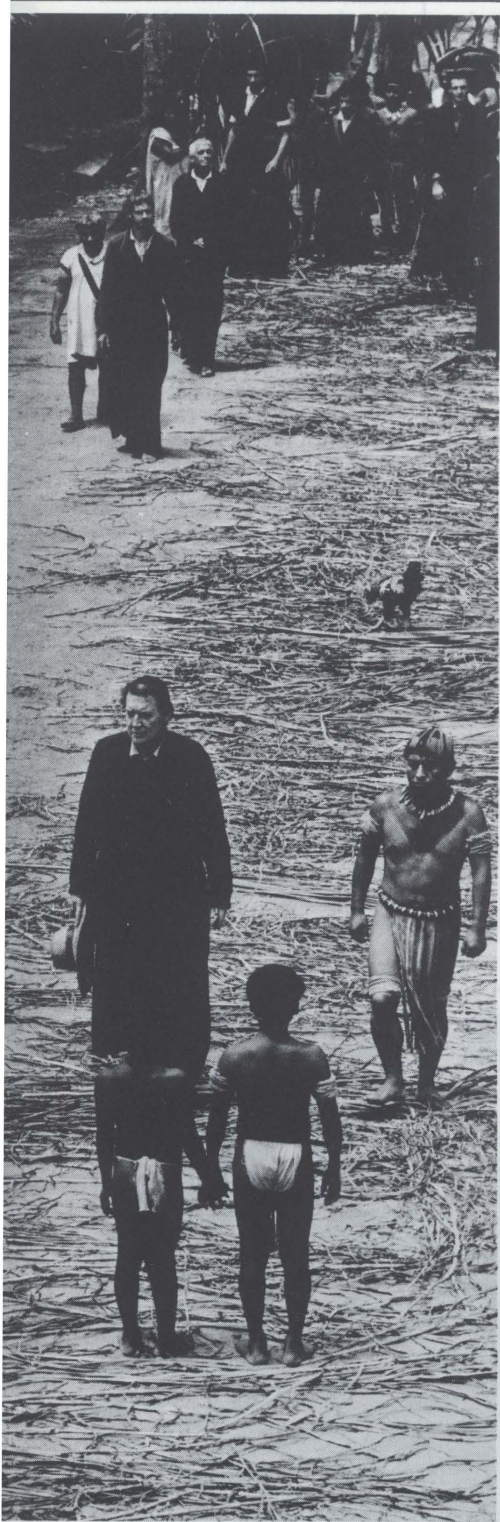
steeply. Conversely, quite a small upturn in sales becomes a much bigger leap in profits. Gearing works for you on the way up and against you on the way down. To show how it works, say your sales are £1m and your interest charges are £500,000, then, ignoring other costs for simplicity's sake, your profit would be £500,000, too. Naturally. But say your sales fall by 10 per cent to £900,000, then your profit, assuming the same interest charges, drops by 20 per cent to £400,000. And vice versa if your sales go up by a tenth.

You can see something like this effect in the comparatively small tv and video group Limehouse Productions. Between 1984 and 1985 its sales contracted by 13 per cent to £3.7m. It was already running at a loss in 1984 and the net effect of the reduction in sales, coupled in this case with an increase in interest charges, was to magnify the loss by 26 per cent to £2.3m. The effect of the gearing was to make the setback twice as bad as it would otherwise have been.

Goldcrest was in a different boat in that its sales were not on a downward trend before it came to grief. Quite the reverse: they soared between 1984 and 1985 by £2m to more than £16m. But this proves how little importance you should attach to size for its own sake. Goldcrest came unstuck, as we know, because it literally got too big for its boots. Two massively expensive productions (*Revolution* and *The Mission*) were entered into at a total cost of \$52.5m. Between them they earned less than \$9.3m from distribution in North America.

We cannot at this stage be sure what exchange rates were appropriate to those production costs, but they are likely to have equated to a sterling figure of around £30m, give or take a million. But at the same time, Goldcrest's net assets, according to the icc report, were only £42.8m. In other words, something like 70 per cent of the group's capital employed was committed to just these two productions. That left no margin for the films to fail or even prove disappointing at the box office, as in due course they did.

For Goldcrest, the problem of over-commitment was compounded by the fact that it was not simply its own money that was at risk. To finance these mega-productions, Goldcrest had



Costly for Goldcrest: *The Mission*.

substantially enlarged its borrowings. Between 1984 and 1985 short-term loans had been raised from £95,000 to £11.4m and long-term ones from £243,000 to £7.8m (not to mention other long-term liabilities up from £20.6m to £26.2m). Against this background, it made little difference that Goldcrest's sales had improved by £2m. Much of this was swallowed up in interest charges up from £97,000 to £1.4m. With hefty provisions required against losses on productions, Goldcrest ended the year with a loss of £20.6m, compared with a profit in the previous year of £1.6m.

The lesson of Goldcrest is that you need to be very wary indeed when a company takes on debts of that size in a business as mercurial and unpredictable as movies. Another lesson, however, is that, if you can read the signs, you can spot trouble coming quite a way ahead and take avoiding measures.

The ICC report includes the Cannon group only in respect of its UK cinemas and only for accounting years up to the beginning of 1986. The real trouble for Cannon began the following year and was reflected in the accounts of the parent company in Los Angeles. But the financial difficulties that culminated in the sale of the film library to Weintraub for \$90m, a \$25m price tag on Elstree studios, the sloughing off of an American cinema chain for \$24.5m and what at one time looked like the complete disposal of the group's British cinemas were already conspicuous even before Cannon reported a 1986 loss of \$60.4m (which has subsequently grown to \$98.3m for the succeeding year).

Smart people never had to wonder whether Cannon was growing too fast for its own good. The evidence was there in the balance sheet if you knew where to look. The two things to notice in this instance were the size and urgency of the group's borrowings and the method it employed of depreciating its films. By mid-1987, Cannon was nursing borrowings that would be enough to give most people bad dreams. Debt had ballooned to \$625m and nearly \$177m of it was due for repayment within twelve months. Against that, the company had shareholders' funds of only \$50.7m. Something had to give, and it did in the stream of disposals that Cannon has kept up ever since.

Cannon has been let off the hook by the intervention of the Italian financier Giancarlo Parretti, who bought effective control in return for a \$100m injection of new capital—a heavy price to pay for the Israeli cousins Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, whose direct interest in the company has been reduced merely to a salary of \$750,000 apiece.

All this became inevitable when Cannon first started sliding towards default in scheduled repayments of debt. The company could not afford to see its net worth slip below \$37.5m for any two consecutive quarters because that would trigger immediate repayment clauses amounting to 10 per cent twice

PRECISELY & BRILLIANTLY
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LOOT

WILDLY FUNNY
THE GUARDIAN

SO FUNNY A PLAY, SO
SPLENDID A FARCE
DAILY EXPRESS

SO ENTERTAINING.
SO AMUSING.
SO HILARIOUS. IT'S
ONE OF THE MOST
ENTERTAINING AND
HILARIOUS PLAYS
I'VE SEEN FOR YEARS
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PLEASE
USE FURTHER
DOOR

Profitable for Zenith: Prick Up Your Ears.

a year on specific borrowings of \$237m. The cash transfusion by Mr Parretti was designed to forestall this—at a cost in terms of loss of independence.

The other curious feature of the Cannon accounts that should have rung warning bells was the company's policy with regard to film depreciation. Depreciation is a charge against the profit, and loss account and therefore affects a company's eventual level of profit. There are various permissible ways of depreciating assets, but Cannon chose one of the most controversial because least conservative. It used to depreciate films not on the basis of so much a year until the cost was completely amortised (still one of the most common methods) but on a formula related only to hope values. It would depreciate films in the proportion that any revenue they took in bore to what the management thought they would eventually bring in.

If that sounds a bit technical, take a simple example. Suppose the management, brimming with enthusiasm for its

new film, thinks it is going to pull in \$100m, which will more than recover its \$20m cost. Instead, it languishes at the box office and returns only \$1m in its first year (the time when most films must do well or not at all). Cannon would apply depreciation at the rate of one-hundredth of the original cost, which comes to just \$200,000. A film that performs so disappointingly in its first year is unlikely to do better later, so prudence suggests that it ought to be written off fast. The accounting convention that Cannon followed, however, meant that failures might be carried too long in the balance sheet at an unrealistic value. In a few years' time, provisions would have to be made against the unamortised part of the asset, just, perhaps, when Cannon could least afford them.

This depreciation practice is acceptable to auditors but is risky. It counts on films being reasonably successful at the box office. Unfortunately, in Cannon's case, few of its recent films have

been the hits that were hoped for, including *Superman IV*, *Masters of the Universe* and the Sylvester Stallone epic *Over the Top*.

Balance sheets and profit and loss accounts do not only reveal bad news in advance. They can also pinpoint success stories in the making. There are quite a few in the ICC study both in film and television.

One thing the study brings out with particular clarity is the level of efficiency in the British film and television industries. You can measure this in a number of ways. Some of the best and most revealing yardsticks are the return on capital employed, the level of profit margins and even the profit per employee. This last is a measure of the efficiency of the average employee and can be measured against his salary to determine whether the company is getting value for money.

One of the most striking features of the report is the way relatively small companies show up especially well by these standards. Take Zenith Productions, the film producing arm of the Carlton Communications group. In 1985-86, its return on capital was a very healthy 150.6 per cent, profit margins were way above average at 15.4 per cent and the profit per employee was the highest of the lot among film production companies at £68,600. Only Granada Television International came close with £66,700.

Zenith is no giant in film circles.

Where Goldcrest in its heyday employed 50 people, Zenith had only 16 in 1985. There are one or two more now, but it is still a very tight ship. Compare this with Goldcrest, whose workforce of 50 produced an average loss of £413,000.

Zenith has never been tempted to stray into the field of the blockbuster. Top weight for a Zenith production is a budget of \$5m. Yet by and large its pictures have been critical successes, many of them box-office ones, too. They include *The Dead*, *Wish You Were Here* and *Prick Up Your Ears*. Zenith is living proof that small is profitable.

The Zenith story rather calls into question one of the principal conclusions of the ICC report. Commenting on the welcome boost in admissions of recent years, it adds that 'much depends on whether the film-makers have the courage to make high-budget quality films after the traumas of the last two years.' This sounds like a call for a return to the production of blockbusters with potential international appeal. Experience shows, however, that this is seldom fulfilled. The modest budgets of British films of recent years have not resulted in thin gruel at the box office, as the report seems to imply. On the contrary, some of the more imaginative pictures, like *My Beautiful Laundrette*, have also found enthusiastic audiences here and overseas, notably in New York.

Aside from individual companies, the ICC report contains fascinating sector

graphs charting the performance in the present decade of the film and television industry relative to other leisure businesses, like music and the audio-visual trade. Film and television lead the field in terms of sales and profits per employee, though they fare much less well on the return of capital criterion, where the music and audio-visual industries perform nearly four times better.

Finally, where should you work if you seek a job connected with film or television? Certainly not in distribution. Salary levels will have risen since 1985-86, but so they will *pro rata* in other fields so we are probably still safe in saying that distribution, on the whole, is a fairly unlucrative business for the employee (though not, of course, for the company). Average salaries at the time of the survey were well below £10,000 and in Cannon Cinemas they were as low as £4,775.

Television, if you can get in, pays much higher and, indeed, TV AM was the highest surviving payer of all, with an average remuneration of £24,000. Only one company just topped it—Goldcrest, and that is no longer independent. These aside, the best company to work for in terms of pay was Zenith, closely followed by Euston Films, which at the time paid average salaries of nearly £24,000 and £22,000 respectively.

Be small, be independent and don't get ideas above your station: that's the three-pronged message of this ICC study. All it takes is a bit of working out. ■

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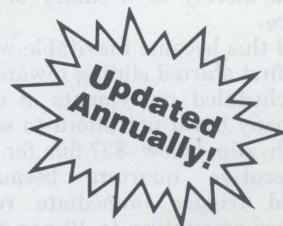
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THINGS CHANGE

Uptown Chicago, November, outside a no-name bar in a district with the highest incidence of murder and casual deaths in a city where a violent crime is committed every 24 seconds, writer-director David Mamet and his customary crew of 'friends and associates' are setting up for some exteriors of his new film, *Things Change*. They seem perfectly at home: it's not hard to imagine the House of Games of Mamet's first film as director concealed behind Kim's Clothing or above Umberto's record store. A dozen cops look on; a bunch of Teamsters 'regulate' the traffic.

The plot, it seems, revolves around Gino (Don Ameche), a Sicilian shoeshine with a remarkable resemblance to a Mafia capo, the heir to Al Capone's hunting ground. The resemblance prompts one of the gangster's henchmen (Joe Mantegna) to propose a deal. Would the old man take the rap for a murder maladroitly committed by none other than the Boss and go to jail for 7-12 years? His reward will be a fishing boat in Naples (which is as strange as offering a Brummie a bungalow in Newcastle) and enough money to return to Italy in American style. The old man, having nothing better to do,

Trickery in a Lake Tahoe casino: forgery in the Paris art world of the 1920s . . .

DON RANVAUD meets David Mamet on the Chicago location of 'Things Change', **RICHARD TRAINOR** talks to Alan Rudolph in Los Angeles about 'The Moderns'

accepts and settles down to a weekend of pay TV and french fries. His 'last cigarette' is a trip to the casinos of Lake Tahoe.

A small team of hoods intent on having a good time accompanies Gino on his travels. Their behaviour—and in the process the old man has a windfall which he would like to return since 'it doesn't belong to him'—arouses the sus-

picious of the local Russian Mafia, who mistake Gino for the real Boss. The Russians turn the roulette tables on the Chicago mobsters and in the end Gino escapes his time in jail.

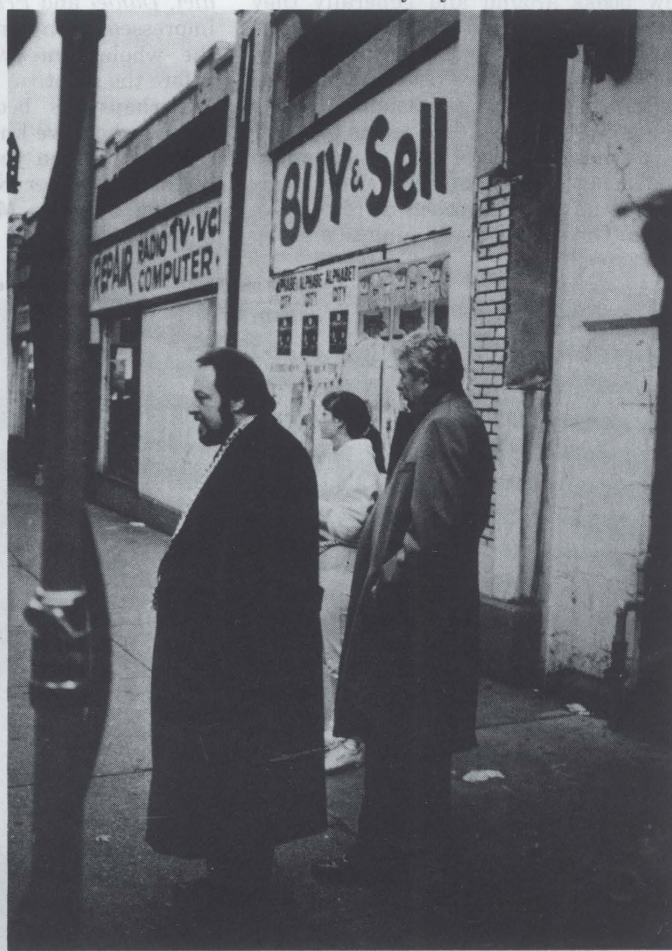
On set, Ricky Jay (a magician by trade and the trickster of *House of Games*) is playing with a couple of decks of cards for the benefit of some locals. The actor J. J. Johnston, who goes back with Mamet more than 20 years, when the director was an actor himself, is trying the three-card trick on Mantegna's stand-in, who proudly reveals that he has stood in for Richard Gere and could easily handle John Travolta if required—and if you can't use that, please pass it on, are you the BBC? The elevated railway clatters overhead: it identifies Chicago as the backdrop and in this relatively low-budget picture (costing perhaps \$4m) it is just about as much as the effects department can afford.

The set is pure Mamet: the rubbish heap of the America which did not make it; the human residue resigned to picking up the rags of the rich and selling them to each other as though they were cloth of gold. In this great ethnic metropolitan mixing-pot, the most one can aspire to is to believe—or

On the Chicago streets: David Mamet.



Ricky Jay (left) and J. J. Johnston.



make someone else believe—that the daily collection of cigarette butts can be magicked into a Havana cigar.

David Mamet, about to celebrate his 40th birthday, chomping a real cigar, is the most sought-after screenwriter in the United States after the success of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (directed by Bob Rafelson in 1979), *The Verdict* (Sidney Lumet, 1981), *The Untouchables* (Brian De Palma, 1987), and a run of theatrical hits which culminated in a Pulitzer Prize for *Glengarry, Glen Ross* (1984). He and Sam Shepard are those rarities, conspicuous star writers. But where Shepard writes in broad daylight, Mamet prefers the lower depths. Mamet's past was punctuated with odd jobs (estate agent, truck-driver, sailor, telephone salesman of carpets), and he has, naturally, an ear for the vernacular. Such idiosyncratic characters as Roma in *Glengarry* and Don Dubrow in *American Buffalo* are the legitimate heirs of Willy Loman and Stanley Kowalski.

'My characters are trapped in the destructive folds of the public myths on my country,' Mamet pronounces. 'The obsessive search for success and individuality has led to the abandonment of a sense of community and collective social goals. This depresses and frightens me. I was raised in a typically American environment. My father was a labour lawyer, my mother a teacher. My parents were not at all interested in preserving their European heritage and were enthusiastic in their complete dedication to the materialist values of American society. There were precious few books around and generally they were kept in little-frequented corners of the house. At home everything was defined negatively. Let's stop being poor, let's stop being Russian, let's stop being Jews. These three terms together give most Americans a substantial headache. In the outside world, everything was coded in much more positive ways. The sense of belonging to a group

made you feel you owned the turf you walked on.

'The discovery of a wonderful tradition of Midwestern writers such as Frank Norris, Willa Cather and especially Theodore Dreiser, from whose work I hope shortly to draw a serial, made me feel that perhaps I could eventually belong to a gang that carried pens and pencils instead of knives and chains.' At Goddard College in Plainville, Vermont, Mamet staged and acted in his first plays. 'When I returned to Chicago in 1972, some friends and I formed the St Nicholas Group and I became the writer in residence. I was influenced by the improvisational work of another theatre, Second City, and then grew very close with the Goodman Theatre where most of my recent work has opened.

'What the characters in my plays are doing while they talk, and the kind of space they find themselves in, should be evoked by their words. If you have to spend a lot of time on descriptions, something is wrong because in the theatre words are actions. The cinema is different, but I was only to discover that once I started to direct my own work. When I was writing for other people, I simply gave an indication of tone, rhythm and the general spatial constraints, but I thought it was wrong to go any further since to conceptualise specific frames is the task and privilege of the director and his director of photography.' It was Mamet's 'friend and associate' Sidney Lumet, with whom Mamet's wife the actress Lindsay Crouse has made three films, *The Verdict*, *Daniel* and *Prince of the City*, who impressed upon him the need to have the whole film properly mapped out before the shoot.

'Perhaps it's because I work with people who have known me and worked with me for ten years or so, including costume designer Nan Cibula and production designer Michael Merritt, but shooting *House of Games* and *Things*

Change has been a piece of cake. Very efficient and very, very enjoyable.' One of the main ingredients in the Mamet cake has been the producer Michael Hausman (*Silkwood*, *Amadeus*, *Ragtime*), who met Mamet on the set of *Places in the Heart*, in which Lindsay Crouse was starring. 'It was very easy,' Hausman said. 'David showed me the script of *House of Games* during a pause by the pool. It was irresistible. When he told me he wanted to direct it as well, I had no call to hesitate. I always try to work with people I like from first meeting.' Hausman has skilfully steered Mamet away from the constraints of Hollywood, while at the same time securing advantageous deals with Orion (for *House of Games*) and Columbia (for *Things Change*).

One of the most controversial aspects of Mamet's work is the place of women in it—or rather their absence. In 23 full-length plays and one-acters, three scripts and two movies as writer-director, there are only a handful of female characters: from the little girl who is told the fairy-tale of *Dark Pony*, to the betrayed daughter who surveys the failure of her own and her father's life in *Reunion*; from the maltreated Debbie and Joan in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (from which came the film *About Last Night*) to Charles Lang's little sister in *Water Engine*, and the appropriately named 'Miss A' of *Shawl*, dedicated to Lindsay Crouse. In *House of Games*, the doctor played by Lindsay Crouse is manipulated by the men who enter the seclusion of her professional world, only to take revenge by behaving no better than them. In *Woods*, however, perhaps Mamet's best work, Ruth controls her would-be lover Nick by means of language and displays, for Mamet, a somewhat uncharacteristic determination and purpose.

'I have always been surprised by this type of question. I think it's absurd to accuse me of misogyny, simply because I have been unable or unwilling to describe female characters as readily as men. It's just that I know men better and it's the duty of a writer to describe what he knows best. Men these days have a greater capacity for hate, and they feel trapped in a society that offers them no jobs and no bright prospects for the future. Even the codes of masculinity have been eroded and there is no easy formula for identity, let alone happiness. If my characters seem to hate women, it's because they hate everything and seek any single-mindedness that will keep them afloat. That doesn't make me or them misogynists. If there's any mileage in this marginal argument, perhaps it's better to talk about misanthropy all round—how about that?'

For all his characters, however, the unlikely means of salvation, the only mechanism which may at a pinch delay death (as Hemingway said) is to continue talking, even if they do not fully understand what they are saying and seem incapable of listening to what anyone else is saying.

D.R.

Don Ameche, the Sicilian shoeshine. Photos: Don Ranvaud.



THE MODERNS

Ten years ago, writer-director Alan Rudolph was five weeks off the start of his third feature, *The Moderns*, a gimlet-eyed view of the American community in Paris in the 1920s, with a cast including Mick Jagger and Keith Carradine. As it often does in his films, however, fate took a hand. When *Remember My Name* opened to a disastrous press, the plug was pulled on *The Moderns*, and for the next five years Rudolph found himself working as a Hollywood contractman.

After *Roadie* (1980) and *Endangered Species* (1982), routine though not entirely anonymous low-budget assignments, Rudolph's fortunes revived with *Choose Me* (1984), a film set in his native Los Angeles, a city about which Rudolph, like his fellow writer-director Robert Towne, has much to say, though in a more oblique and stylised vein. For his next film, Rudolph elected, despite the critical and commercial success of the lighthearted *Choose Me*, to return to the darker chords he had sounded in *Remember My Name*. But the result, *Trouble in Mind* (1986), got another bad press and Rudolph was once again unemployable as a director of his own scripts. There followed *Songwriter*, a competent Country music picture, and *Made in Heaven*, a sugary celestial romance. ('The writer-producers said they wanted me, but it turned out they didn't want the darker touches I would have added.')

Rudolph, however, had continued to tinker with *The Moderns*. He brought in his best friend, the late film editor Jon Bradshaw, to doctor the script and continued to pitch the project at his long-time producers Carolyn Pfeiffer and David Blocker. Pfeiffer's company Alive Films finally took on the project, but with a reduced budget and Paris locations recreated in Montreal.

In *The Moderns*, Rudolph has cast his repertory company—Keith Carradine, Geraldine Chaplin, Genevieve Bujold, and John Lone, in the part that was to have gone to Jagger—in a story of artistic forgery and rekindled passion set in the Paris of the 1920s. One theme is the vanity of the artist and the venality of those who trade in art. A woman, planning to leave her husband, persuades a reluctant American (Carradine) to copy the family collection of paintings. She then intends to decamp with the originals. A double-cross, however, leaves the forger with them...

At the time of this interview, Rudolph was in Los Angeles where he was preparing to shoot tests for *The Far Side*, a long-planned film transposition of Gary Larson's one-panel cartoons. (In Britain, incidentally, Larson's cartoons can be found in London's *Evening Standard*.)

RICHARD TRAINOR: Are you satisfied with the way *The Moderns* has been distributed in the United States?

ALAN RUDOLPH: The problem is that companies are not really interested in distributing films beyond their target markets. At least that is what I found with *Alive*. I don't think they make their money from distribution; they make it from the ancillary markets: pay tv, cable and video rentals. A small distributor will open a film in the art houses, but if it reaches that audience and still has appeal to wider markets, as was the case with *Choose Me*, they don't do much to follow that up. I find that these little companies are just like the big distributors: they are all so conservative, and the only difference is that the small companies are willing to take less.

The weakness in so-called independent films is that they are always dependent on the money. People assume that the little companies are taking greater risks, but in fact they are not. The films I have made have all been so low-budget—*The Moderns* at \$3.5m was my most expensive film—that it is virtually impossible to lose money on them.

—Tell me about *The Moderns*.

—In America, it seems to be a very misunderstood film. First, most people have approached it as though it were intended to be a definitive history of the period. Yet our whole recollection of that period is based on myth. It has been imagined and re-imagined and packaged; our references are from memoirs and gossip and innuendo and lies. The severest critics of the film are those who misunderstand the period as one of art, rather than one concerned with the art of buying and selling.

We addressed the idea that we live in counterfeit times and that basically what the 1920s did, with art and fashion, was to announce to the world that we had entered the twentieth century. The artists had discovered it earlier through their work, machinery had discovered it through a war and war productivity, but the world in general discovered it in the 20s, when art and commerce came together.

Art has become vulnerable to exploitation and it has become a social commodity. That is one theme I tried to pursue in *The Moderns*. Artists are celebrities and their value increases according to their social position and the price of their work and the pedigree of the gallery which represents them. I think the film is a critique of critics as much as anything else: much of the critical response to painting or film or literature is not a pure response, but a response to other critical responses.

I guess the problem some critics have had with the film is that they don't like their myths replaced with other myths. Our intention was not to be factual or accurate, but to show some of these characters, Hemingway in particular, before the cement had dried on the statue.

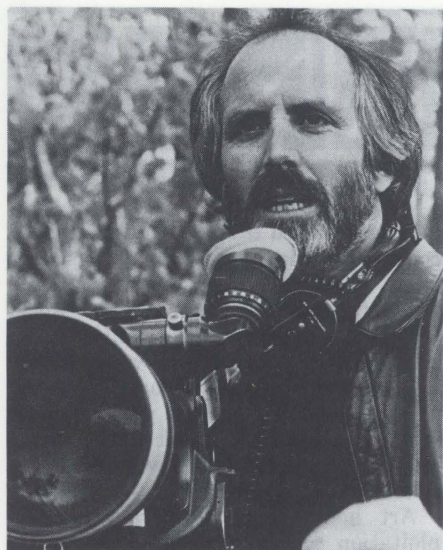
—Why did you choose 1926 as the year when art and commerce converge?

—Well, 1925 was the year of a major *art décoratif* exhibition and 1927 was the year when Paris began to taper off: 1926 seemed the time when the escapades of 20s Paris were at their height. And the essence of the period, which we have tried to retain, is its irreverence and humour.

R.T.: This is the fourth time you have used Keith Carradine. What does he

The Moderns: Keith Carradine (the artist) and Wallace Shawn (the gossip columnist).





Alan Rudolph.

bring to a role that makes him your Everyman?

A.R.: He is an unafraid actor and vanity is not his primary pursuit. He is also very much an American actor: his whole look, his honesty and his directness. Most importantly, for me, audiences are able to make an investment in the characters he plays, because he comes across as someone you can know. He can participate in the most unreal situations and still keep the emotional integrity in mind. Also, Keith is nothing if not romantic.

—Like you?

—That's my *Scarlet Letter*. People think 'A.R.' stands for Alan Rudolph, but it really stands for 'A Romantic'. I guess I find more comfort in romanticised situations: they programme human emotions and that interests me.

—The American critics seem only to enjoy that aspect of you when you play it on the light keys.

—First, I don't believe there are many critics who want to confront a piece of work on its own terms, which seems to me the only valid way it can be judged. Secondly, when you do something original, such as *Remember My Name*, which

is in the genre of a Joan Crawford or Barbara Stanwyck picture, yet made contemporary and slightly off-centre, people have a hard time getting into the biting romance of it. I like to create situations where audiences, which includes critics, think they are ahead of the film and then to surprise them. It's a strategy I rely on to add momentum, because my films are not really strong on plots or events.

—Were you hurt by the critical reaction to *Remember My Name*?

—Without question it changed the course of my career. I had worked with Robert Altman [Rudolph rewrote *Nashville* and scripted *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*], but whatever protection that relationship afforded was gone. After *Remember My Name*, even Bob's loyal supporters were hoping he would disassociate himself from me because they felt I was bringing him down. We had a foreign investor prepared to put up the money for *The Moderns* and then sell the distribution rights later. At the last minute, this guy decided he wanted to get an American distributor involved, and after *Remember My Name* nobody would even talk to us.

—You are obviously an admirer of Altman.

—There are only two real American film visionaries of the past 25 to 30 years whose work appeals to me. And like all good American natural resources, they are either endangered or have left town. One is Kubrick, who I think probably takes the most complete and searching look at whatever he decides to tackle, and the other is Altman. No one working in American films takes as complete a look as these two. I like Woody Allen and Coppola and Scorsese, the Coen brothers as well—but only those two occupy the Pantheon.

R.T.: Your films have a strong musical identity and some of the songs you have chosen as themes recur as motifs.

A.R.: I'm careful about the music I use. It's never background—or if it is, it's scored background. If you live in Los

Angeles, one thing that happens is that music manipulates you and your whole life becomes the soundtrack of the movie you're living; I have had hundreds of great film experiences while driving my car. Music and actors are the film-maker's two main tools. And music, more than anything, creates a mood and that mood extends the actor's performance. If you take a scene and play different music behind it, not only will the whole mood and emotion of the scene change, but the purpose of it as well. Music's force and main target in human experience is to create mystery.

—How did you come to write *Choose Me*?

—The seed was planted about three months before I began the screenplay when I first heard the song 'Choose Me'. At first it was to be a film about a guy who escapes from a mental home. The last ingredient to be added was the idea of Dr Nancy Love. I happened to hear a radio psychologist fielding intimate questions from strangers who were going to be influenced by her 30-second answers. I listened to that show for two days, then began writing and finished the script a week later. We shot it in less than a month for \$750,000.

The process of making *Choose Me* so quickly, with so few revisions and so little money, and then to have it actually work out, was a joyous feeling—especially when you are used to getting beat up all the time. It was the easiest film I've yet made and came right out of the essence of what I write and who I am and how I make films. I think of *Choose Me* as the middle chapter of an extended piece of writing, with *Welcome to L.A.* as roughly the opening chapter.

—Will you return to Los Angeles to re-explore ground you have already covered?

—I have been trying for five or six years to get out of this city and I will return to it as source material. But you don't just want to keep doing the same thing, or at least you want it to be something you learn from rather than simply an exercise. You spend most of your life longing to be somewhere else and that's fine for a romantic, blue, sentimental mood, but you know the years get eaten up by longing. I think in the end where I'm probably headed is the Pacific Northwest, where I'm likely to shoot *The Far Side*.

—Why do you want to make a film of a cartoon strip?

—I was drawn to it probably by the point of view I have. My only requirement for the cast is that I don't want anyone in it whose reputation would distract the audience. I'm very excited about it. I'll start shooting the tests, then I'll cut it and we should begin filming in November. This is the only project I've ever been involved with that I thought could make a lot of money without me having to alter my point of view on it. I'd like to see what that's like.

R.T.

Things Change and *The Moderns* will be screened at the London Film Festival.



John Lone (the art collector Beltram Stone).

Au revoir



les enfants

PG

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Anthony Smith

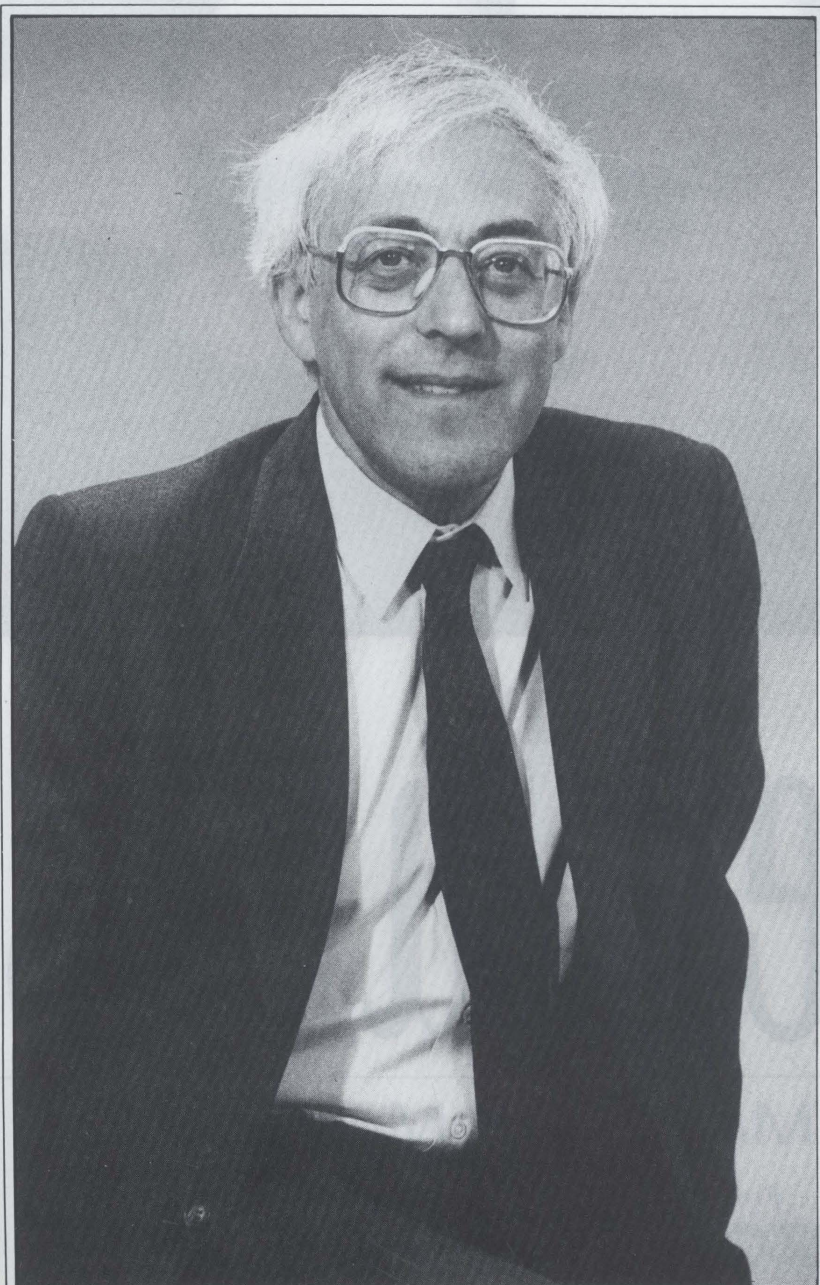


PHOTO SARAH QUILL

Anthony Smith, who is leaving the BFI in October after serving as its Director since 1979, is an enthusiast. He throws himself at projects and plans, institutions and ideas, with a fierce and inexhaustible energy which can be exhilarating and infuriating for those around him. He reminds one of Dali's painting of Groucho Marx as the Hindu God Siva, small, besuited and dapper, telephones in every hand and a slightly manic but immensely pleased look in his eyes.

His career has taken several unexpected lurches. In his late teens Smith travelled widely. He worked on a kibbutz, went to the Lebanon, took a train across the Soviet Union with a teach yourself Russian book (and, even today, he startles Soviet visitors by telling them where the toilet is in Russian). This restless travel, which has continued throughout his life and which he adores, and his contacts with the young great and good at Oxford, undoubtedly helped him acquire a traineeship at the BBC (he started at the same time as Dennis Potter, who lasted all of six weeks). In 1961, at the age of twenty-one, he left Oxford (where he read English) and became a producer at the BBC, where he devised and produced *Europa*, a review of world news, as well as producing a satire show called *At the 11th Hour* (which, curiously, brought Esther Rantzen to the public's gaze).

Two of his most enduring characteristics were established during this period: his encyclopaedic knowledge of people, places and facts and his ability to spot new talent. As a successful producer of the controversial and pioneering current affairs programme *24 Hours*, he seemed destined for the BBC's higher echelons; however, in 1971, disenchanted with the Beeb, he surprised many people by returning to academia as a Fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford. It is said that Huw Wheldon, then Director of Television, was so bemused by Smith's decision that he offered him an unprecedented letter which guaranteed a job at the BBC whenever he wanted to return. At St Antony's he wrote or edited twelve books in eight years and served as academic adviser to the Annan Committee on Broadcasting. When this frenzy of writing blew itself out in 1979, a chance meeting with a member of the Board of Governors of the British Film Institute launched him on his new career as director of that institution.

From his rather drab beginnings in a white-collar London suburb (where he lived in the next street to Leon and Samuel Brittan), he has become a member of the media establishment, with a flat in Albany and a cottage in Oxfordshire. Until recently he wrote a column for the *Listener*, and he pops up regularly on TV and in the newspapers; he travels the US giving handsomely paid lectures; he has made cunningly orchestrated (if unsuccessful) attempts to become Director-General of the BBC and Chief Executive of Channel 4. He is on the steering committee for this, the board of that and the standing commission for, well, not to put too fine a point on it, the other.

Although for a long time associated with the Labour Party and, indeed,

considered a trendy lefty in the 1970s, Smith now appears as the epitome of the Thatcherite intellectual. During his book-writing and consultancy years, someone described him as a one-man VAT-registered cottage industry; since becoming director of the BFI his fund-raising acumen has become legendary, and under his tutelage the BFI, unusually for a subsidised organisation, now makes more money for itself than it receives from the state. However, despite this, he is not a Thatcherite figure. Although he is not and probably never has been a socialist, his politics and cultural intuitions are similar to the liberal reformers of the eighteenth century rather than the estate agents who are the Red Guard of the Thatcherite Revolution. He has more in common with Joseph Banks (who went with Cook on his first tour and started Kew Gardens) than with Keith Joseph. He feels closer to the builders of museums and libraries, collections and institutions, than to the sellers of 'services'.

Like the former, he has a desire to use money for the public good and a collector's interest in ideas and objects. Smith has a mania for building. From the age of 24, he has built a succession of houses for himself before moving on to the next one, and this compulsion engulfed the BFI in a building programme. Ian Christie, Head of the BFI's Distribution Division, is unstinting in his praise of Smith's overall contribution to the BFI. 'Before Smith the Institute merely existed,' argues Christie. 'Smith invented it.'

Certainly, in the physical sense, this is true; he has initiated and raised the funds for the building of the Getty Conservation Centre at Berkhamsted, the Museum of the Moving Image on the South Bank and the new BFI headquarters at Stephen Street, which replaced the old, uncomfortable offices which were spread across Soho. However, it is not merely the physical fabric of the BFI which has benefited from Smith's involvement. Even those who feel that he does not really understand film culture (and there are some) concede that he has raised the public profile of the Institute and given it an energy which was almost wholly lacking.

It was partly this track record of fund-raising which, in April of this year, convinced Magdalen College, Oxford, that Smith was the ideal choice to be President of the College. Reports of the appointment in that bastion of the establishment, the *Telegraph*, suggested that some of the Fellows thought the appointment was another nail in the college's academic reputation; one can visualise them spluttering into their port at the appointment of a Jewish, ex-BBC current affairs producer, media man. 'Still,' one can hear them muttering, 'at least he can raise money.'

Those who espouse this attitude entirely misjudge the man. The key to Smith's fund-raising, and what drives him on and maintains his enthusiasm, is that he loves ideas, the bigger and more wide-ranging the better. He falls into 'big' ideas with the same deep, bone-stretching pleasure that a marathon runner falls into a hot bath. Consequently, he wants to provide a framework within which people with ideas can flourish. The money is merely the means to that end. Charlie Citrine's lament in *Humboldt's Gift* could easily be

Smith's: 'Money wasn't what I had in mind. Oh God, no, what I wanted was to do good. I was dying to do something good. And this feeling for good went back to my early and peculiar sense of existence—sunk in the glassy depths of life and groping, thrillingly and desperately, for sense, a person keenly aware of painted veils, of Maya, of domes of many-coloured glass staining the white radiance of eternity, quivering in the intense inane and so on. I was a nut about such things.'

There is nothing that he likes better than to be surrounded by people (usually men) who can talk. The more wide-ranging and polemical the discussion, the more he feels at home. Throughout his career Smith has recruited and supported people who have very fixed ideas and who think that they see the world in a very clear way (perhaps to compensate for his own tendency to see the world through a glass darkly). The drawback of this recruitment policy is that these aggressive and energetic figures want to dominate him and on occasion he has discovered that the cuckoo wants to throw him out of the nest. Not that this has changed his mind; despite the complications he continues to surround himself with people who have what he calls 'life'. The fund-raising allows him to attract people who have ideas and to contribute to institutions which embody ideas.

It is significant that after nine years at the BFI there has not been, and apparently will not be, a book about feature films. This lack of confidence in his grasp of film theory is not apparent in his work on television and public-service broadcasting, and on the press and information technology. His work contains an interesting admixture of scepticism about the aesthetic quality of the TV experience and a belief in television's ability to establish new democratic forms.

His reasons for leaving the BBC betray a great deal about his character and his moral and political attitudes to broadcasting. He believes that institutions are the bearers and preservers of values and that people who work in broadcasting institutions have moral responsibilities which far outweigh their organisational commitments. The BBC had, in Smith's view, ceased to do that. Producers and managers in the corporation had become used to the easy repertoire or easy excuses which appalled his sense of rectitude. More to the point, though, his emotional investment in institutions is extremely high and, organisations being the sum of collective compromises, and often cowardice, they tend to leave him feeling that he has been let down.

He believed that the BBC should deal in 'pure values' and that it had been betrayed by 'corporate protectors'. Smith wanted to purify the organisation and rushed off to Oxford, at the invitation of the historian Raymond Carr, Warden of St Antony's, to write a book which would set out his belief that public-service broadcasting could and should be done in a non-institutional way. One key idea in the book established the framework of his life for the next eight years: 'The time has come, it is clear, for a considerable increase in the extent to which broadcasting organisations give away editorial control over part of their broadcasting time, in

order that anyone who wishes to can have access for a specific propaganda message to the audience created by that organisation.' Smith hoped that this democratic breakthrough would lead to the destruction of the 'mutual stereotype between communicator and audience' and undermine the power of the corrupt broadcasters who, in his view, had become an unelected priesthood which had stolen the most important of modern institutions from under the nose of democracy.

This desire to reform broadcasting in general, and the BBC in particular, led him to argue that the fourth TV channel, which in the early 1970s had yet to be allocated, should be handed over to a National Television Foundation (later the Open Broadcasting Authority). The idea that a television authority would act merely as a clearing house for programmes came from his experience of the Ford and Leverhulme research foundations. He explored this further in a paper written for one of the broadcasting trade unions which gained wide currency when published in the *Guardian*.

Although he did not create a new theoretical framework, Smith's reputation as a commentator and analyst of television grew apace and most insiders assumed when the Annan Committee on Broadcasting was established that Smith's presence on it was a foregone conclusion. However, although his name was on the original list of members, Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, in one of his periodic personal vendettas (brought on by Smith's attack on Wilson for being soft on the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia) ordered Smith's name to be taken off the list. Noel Annan, however, had different ideas and asked Smith to undertake some research projects for the committee.

The committee, much to the chagrin of ITV, advised the government to offer the fourth channel to an Open Broadcasting Authority. Unfortunately, it made a terrible hash of explaining how this new authority was to be funded. Although the Conservative government which was elected in 1979 eventually decided to adopt many of the ideas of the fourth channel, they cocooned it within the safe regulatory protection of the Independent Broadcasting Authority. Although Smith was annoyed by the confusion over funding (he argues that the OBA should have been funded directly by the ITV levy; which is in fact how the IBA decided to fund it), he answered the call in 1981, when he was asked to be an adviser and, subsequently, a board member of Channel 4.

The most striking feature of Smith's attitude to organisations is that he treats the members like a family. He opens his house for meetings, invites people to drop in, puts people up and spends most of his waking time working for the institution in question. His enthusiasm for life and his desire for success will benefit his new family at Magdalen; however, no one should be at all surprised if, in the future, he pulls every string and bends every ear to become Chairman of the Channel 4 board or the BFI. Families are difficult to leave.

DAVID DOCHERTY

The Mad Adventures

of

TERRY

GILLIAM

DAVID • MORGAN



The man is a double, the horse is a dummy ...

'I get the feeling that, a bit like *Brazil*, the making of the film is going to be like the film itself. Where *Brazil* was about a nightmare, this one is about impossibility and overcoming it, and trying to push through a lot of things and a lot of people who don't think they can do it, because they are realistic.'

Terry Gilliam obviously knew, perhaps better than anyone, the impossibility of creating his new film, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. Just before shooting began in September last year, the director admitted what everyone has been trying to tell him ever since: the film cannot be done. But Gilliam went ahead and did it anyway. What his ultimate vision of *Munchausen* will be is anyone's guess, including Gilliam's own. He has spoken of making this film for years. But the processes by which it has been evolving, growing, shrinking, and being cast into the cold public spotlight before its time, have proved bigger than anything he has experienced before. Gilliam has stood apart, feeling protected from the 'factory' aspects of film-making. Now he is caught up in the largest movie to shoot in Europe since *Cleopatra*.

Though born in Minneapolis, the 47-year-old writer-director grew up in Hollywood's backyard, an environment which fuelled both his desire to enter films and his dislike of the film community itself. 'A lot of it came from the fact that I wanted desperately to get into movies and didn't have any idea how one got into it. And I didn't like the rules of the game, if you were going to work your way up from the bottom. The majority of people in the movie business in Hollywood are there for the money and the power, and if you are working there you have to talk to them, and if you do that you are going to be influenced by their attitudes. I don't want to talk to them about anything: hand over the loot and let me get on with the work. And what I like in England is that the film industry is not a very healthy thing, so that those involved with it are there because they love film. I really just spend my time working in a very useful way, as opposed to meetings with a lot of inane discussion ...'

Baron Munchausen's estimated budget of nearly \$25m made it one of the largest independent productions in history. Earmarked as a co-production between Laura Film (the film's production office headed by Thomas Schuhly) and Prominent Features (a division of Prominent Pictures, the Monty Python organisation), *Munchausen* was picked up by David Puttnam and Columbia, which signed a distribution deal for worldwide theatrical and video rights (excluding Italy and Germany, territories already signed for by other investors). The \$20.5m which Columbia promised upon delivery of the completed film (making it a 'negative pick-up') was used as collateral to obtain a bond from Film Finance, Inc, a Los Angeles-based insurance firm.

But delays in the pre-production



Survivors of a shipwreck.

period only foreshadowed the greater financial and logistical difficulties once the film started shooting at Cinecittà in Rome, and later during location work in Spain. Because *Munchausen* is an independent production—caught without the built-in safety net of an in-house studio film—Gilliam found himself struggling to complete his dream project, while up against the same Hollywood bureaucracy he has repeatedly criticised since before his much publicised battle to save his cut of *Brazil* from that film's US distributors. And the film's problems, already bad enough, were made to seem even worse because of the press reports they generated.

The insurance company wanted no part of a runaway production, which was what *Munchausen* appeared to be. They sought financial assistance from Columbia, but by that time the upheaval of management which marked the departure of David Puttnam as head of the studio left no one willing to address the film's troubles: *Munchausen* was an independent feature and therefore on its own. 'Basically you do a film in a certain atmosphere,' Thomas Schuhly said. 'Columbia just said, "Okay, we changed our management, the guys who set up this atmosphere are out, therefore there is no more atmosphere—there is just a deal." It's like getting married. You marry because your intention is to get along, and beside your legal obligations there are many other obligations you don't put on paper. Here there was no divorce, but the marriage was different suddenly.'

In November 1987, Film Finance halted shooting for two weeks in order to rein in the spiralling budget and shooting schedule. Gilliam and Schuhly were threatened with dismissal. Rather than have his film taken away from him, Gilliam found himself forced to make drastic cuts in the screenplay, to eliminate or pare down the more expensive sequences. Even given the slicing

and hacking, which couldn't totally prevent a budget overage projected at about \$10m, Gilliam is convinced that *Munchausen* still stands as a film far more elaborate, more difficult and more uncommon than anything he has ever experienced or imagined.

It is certainly far removed from the quick, frenzied shoots to which he has accustomed himself, having to work with new talent not used to dealing with special effects—or, for that matter, with Gilliam himself. It was Gilliam's association with Thomas Schuhly which brought the production to Rome, where Schuhly hoped to foster a special working relationship between Gilliam and the artists at Cinecittà. 'The English character for me is a very dark one,' Schuhly said. 'Italians are very light, very sensual. And I thought that the film should get the feel of a very light atmosphere. You see it on the screen—it's totally different from *Brazil*.' Director of photography Giuseppe Rotunno, art director Dante Ferretti and costume designer Gabriella Pescucci were signed up. Gilliam's enthusiasm for working in Rome soared.

One of the painful truths of this arduous shoot, however, is that Gilliam's working habits do not travel well. Though he is thorough in preparing films down to the most minute detail, the time it takes to carry those details on to film never matches his hopes. Even when the shooting schedule approaches anywhere near normal, he feels 'Normal isn't fast enough.' And while his other pictures have helped him establish a team of people who apparently satisfy his demands, few Gilliam veterans are in Rome to take part in this adventure. An apt example of the problems the production has faced is the difficulty of communication on the set, which sometimes finds Gilliam on one side and the Italian crew on the other, with a harried interpreter in the middle.

On the set of *Vulcan's* arms factory during the last week of shooting before the 1987 Christmas break, the smoke-filled atmosphere lit by the fiery yellow and orange glow of the furnaces is deceptively arctic, as Gilliam tries to get a single take to his satisfaction. John Neville, as the Baron, is sprawled in front of the camera, being pushed along a track towards a pool of water. While they run through the shot, Gilliam watches a TV monitor which shows the camera's POV. After calling action, his eyes are glued to the screen. He silently mouths the dialogue as Neville speaks. His eyes are wide and gleeful; he looks like a child watching his favourite Saturday morning cartoon show. But his happiness turns to dismay as the take continues, and the camera moves just don't match what he wants to see. He huddles again with the camera crew, his frustration obvious.

The shot is run through over and over again. As Gilliam examines the monitor on each take, his happiness with Neville's reading begins to evaporate. He goes back to the crew. 'It's nothing like in rehearsal,' he yells. 'I want the shot done right here as it was done. It is now 11 o'clock in the morning. You don't have a director. You don't want to turn over? I go home!' Gilliam storms off the set, with the actors sitting nearby looking somewhat shocked, though not too surprised.

'He knows just what he wants,' says Winston Dennis, a huge, cuddly giant playing Albrecht (he also appeared in *Time Bandits* and *Brazil*). 'It's the first time I've seen Terry blow his top.' Neville's stand-in has taken the Baron's place, as the crew reviews the moves they're supposed to make. 'Of course, on the set, we're two little angels,' says Dennis, nodding towards Oliver Reed. Reed rolls his eyes in amusement.

Outside the soundstage next day Moo Moo, a cow, is tethered to a tree, awaiting her appearance on the set. Her



Terry Gilliam, Sarah Polley (Sally Salt).

genial keeper shoos people away, but there's no need; the cow is quite unfriendly to anyone passing by. 'It was actually written as a herd of cows,' remarks Gilliam. 'It comes from Gabriel García Márquez' book *Autumn of the Patriarch*, where he has this scene of a cow on a balcony. I don't know, cows are on my mind. I made the mistake of having animals all over the place on this film.' As he walks towards the Cinecittà lunchroom, for the only hour of peace he seems to have each day, he talks spiritedly and enthusiastically, even of events he might prefer to forget. His infectious giggle makes him sound like a tenor Woody Woodpecker.

John Neville (Baron Munchausen). Photo: Sygma.



DAVID MORGAN: How have you had to adjust your working habits since coming to Rome?

TERRY GILLIAM: For people here the concept of the maestro is very important—this one man, from whom all knowledge and wisdom flows—and I don't like to work that way. I really like being part of a team, but people here aren't used to working that way—or at least the people on this film aren't. I think it's a Catholic thing. If the director can be made God, then people can be popes and cardinals and bishops, and so the greater the director, the greater your popehood or your bishopric. It really is like that. So they elevate the director.

It's more of a team in England; it's the nature of the society. They all squawk, and they go at each other, but basically people have an attitude that they are more or less equal. They come up and say 'Why are you doing that?' or 'What about doing this or that?' I get a lot of feedback, a lot of information, and they give me ideas that are better than my own ideas. I become a filter for a lot of ideas, and that give and take is the way it works. Here I have to place the camera *exactly*, and if I don't say something it doesn't generally happen.

After working for years with the same people, they got used to me, so that you could communicate in Neanderthal grunts. But here, because everyone is new, it's a big problem that I didn't really worry about early enough. You see, I get very impatient. I want to do things fast, explain things fast. When you do that, no one knows what you're talking about, and because people are not used to complicated ways of making special effects, they're worried. They want to work slowly until they understand. That slows the process down and I get frustrated. I only control my madness with a lot of feedback on how the world really is, and if nobody tells me what *they* think the world is, I have no idea what it is.

We're in a strange situation. The film has gone way over budget, all sorts of political problems. Also, the studio isn't a problem, because they made a contract and they are going to stick to it. They have the *best* deal, of this year or many years to come. We have cut the film a lot, even before we started shooting. We've been trimming it down and trimming it down. And up to now I have really avoided looking at the film. For the first time in my life, I have never gone to the rushes. I go to the cutting room and see it on the editing machine, and we go through it in little sections. But I am trying to stay away from it for some reason. I don't know why.

—Is it that you are afraid you will want to reshoot things?

—Yes, I think so. The most frightening thing is when you actually get close to doing something good. You can just make a little mistake then and it's destroyed. It's as though it is so delicate that with just one wrong turn it collapses.

Also, there's the feeling that I am doing something in the public domain.

It exists in a lot of people's minds, and I worry that I will disappoint those people, because they have their idea of *Munchausen* and mine is different. I worried about it for a long time, and now I just ignore it. We invented most of this film. He's Munchausen, but I'm using him for my own purposes. It was too restrictive just to do the original, because there was no shape to the whole thing, other than this incredible liar telling these amazing tales. But I'm beginning to think that everybody is getting a little bored with science fiction and the same creatures that keep popping up all over the place. What is nice about *Munchausen* is that it is eighteenth-century science fiction, so it has a different attitude. The imagery is quite unlike what people are used to at the moment. It gets a bit closer to something like *The Thief of Baghdad*, where it isn't about machinery—it's about people and gods and mythological things.

I just got hooked again on my same old theme, Fantasy/Reality. Lies and truth is an extension of that, and it's about age and youth. Also death, birth, all those things. I *think* that's what it's about . . . *Time Bandits* was a story about a boy going through space and time and history, and never knowing

● The maestro from whom all knowledge flows . . . ●

whether it was real or a dream; *Brazil* was about a man who refused to take his responsibility in the real world and spent his time dreaming, ultimately escaping in madness; and *Munchausen* is really the happy ending, the triumph of fantasy.

D.M.: Do you think there will be more cuts in the script?

T.G.: I don't know. We had another session this weekend where we had to give another bit away because the film is being taken over by the completion company, and they need their little pound of flesh to go back and show that they're on top of it. And so we keep giving them flesh. We're down to the bones now. It's weightier in a strange way. It's not as fantastic. Luckily we started with such an extravagant piece, there's room to trim, but the terrible thing is that the stories I was most interested in were lost very early on. There was a whole thing about a horse being cut in half that's *wonderful*. It's a great sequence. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to make this film—it's not there. It's still the same film somehow.

That happened on *Brazil*, but the cuts were made in less threatening circumstances. And I was in a position where I could decide for myself that we were

going over budget and time, and we'd stop and make trims. *This* has been these 'crisis meetings' where we have 48 hours to come up with the answer. So, 'That's it! Call the lawyers, it's over, the film is dead, the Baron is finally buried.' And then, Bingo! At the last minute we've found an answer every time. I have never seen a film so determined to keep going.

—When you storyboard and design a film, do you take into consideration how much something might cost, how difficult it might be to film? Or do you let your imagination take you away and worry about logistics later?

—I sit there and I really think about it and I work out, 'It'll only take me a day to do that,' and then I think I know what I'm doing. And I've always been wrong. And each time I can convince myself that, 'No, I am right *this* time despite the past.' Strangely enough, because I believe it's possible, I am able to convince other people that it's possible. So we venture forth on these adventures that are just totally impossible. But it's too late by the time people have discovered the truth.

We have on the film now David Tomblin, the associate producer. He is one of the most experienced first assistant directors in the world. He

and suddenly discovered how wonderful they were. A good actor is incredibly vulnerable, and if you don't take advantage of that vulnerability—if you encourage them and give them confidence, laugh when they're funny and cry when they're tragic—it's quite easy and people start trusting you. I like working with British actors particularly because they are technically wonderful and less 'Methody' than American actors. You can be sitting chatting about the last football game and then say, 'All right, here we go' and Boom! They are right immediately into the character. They do the scene, it might be a fairly emotional scene, and then it's over and we're back to talking about football.

On the Vulcan dining-room set, they are filming Uma Thurman's entrance as the goddess Venus. Standing naked on a giant clamshell, posed to mimic Botticelli's painting, the young actress is understandably nervous about her scene. In between takes, she keeps her composure by dancing a silly little dance on the shell. Her surreal act resembles a Monty Python cartoon, and the connection of this image is not lost on Gilliam, who stands dumbfounded, watching Uma Thurman inadvertently recreate a piece he had animated before she was even born.

D.M.: How did you get involved with film-making in the first place, in particular with animation?

T.G.: That was really a fluke. I was on a programme [*We Have Ways of Making You Laugh*] doing caricatures of the guests, and they had some material they didn't know how to present. I suggested I might make an animated film and they let me; and overnight I was an animator. And then when *Holy Grail* came along, Terry Jones and I decided to be film directors. We had never done *that* before. We make these quantum leaps and once your name is up there with the credits, people believe it.

I always drew when I was a kid. I did cartoons because it's easiest to impress people if you draw a funny picture, and I think that was a sort of passport through much of my early life. The only art training I had was in college where I majored in Political Science. I took several art courses, drawing and sculpture classes. My training has actually been fairly sloppy and I've been learning about art in retrospect. But I've always kept my eyes open, and things that I like I am influenced by.

—How is your work with Dante Ferretti?

—It's great. This is one reason that I came to Italy, just the artistic side of things. I don't think the film would look nearly so good if we were back in England, because everybody here has such a sense of colour and form. That's one of the good things about being here, that the film has been influenced by being in Rome.

Something was bothering me about



The Nightmare Come True...

the physical location of the dining-room, where the Baron and Vulcan are supposed to be sitting at table with goblets of wine; it wasn't quite right. So Vulcan is now in a room that is like an eighteenth-century salon, and it's very delicate. This is partly because of this location we were sitting at. We changed it round, having him drink out of these little demitasse cups. Here's this rough, crude, brutish man having to behave in a civilised eighteenth-century manner. It starts getting better and more interesting. And that's the result of a physical place. You are sitting there and you're trying to force the place to behave as you originally conceived the

Sting. Photo: Sygma.



● Call the lawyers... The Baron is finally buried ●

did *Empire of the Sun*, *Gandhi*, *Cry Freedom*, *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. He came late to the film, which is a pity, because he is the one that knows better. I have to try to convince him; he's what I need.

One of our problems is that we spend so long on trying to deal with some of the special effects and the set-ups that the actors don't have time to work. John Neville has been here every day for months and he has worked only in little bits. And this is really depressing, because he is an extraordinary character: he runs the Stratford Festival Company [in Ontario], he has a hundred actors and they do fifteen productions a season, and he directs, he acts, he's an incredibly organised man. Now he is caught in this nightmare where he has to sit in make-up for hours and then doesn't get to work. And he sees around him disorganisation, inefficiency and just chaos, day after day. He has stayed away from films for years, he has concentrated on theatre. Finally we lure him back and it's like *The Nightmare Come True*. I don't even know what to say to him any more, because I can't justify it.

I really like actors. This started on *Jabberwocky*, right after *Holy Grail*, working with Python. I went and did my first film on my own with actors,

scene, and it doesn't quite fit. You fight this for a long time, and you eventually give in and let the place dictate a few ideas.

Dante is an incredibly hard worker, he never stops. At first of course it was difficult because he wants to do his job and I want to do his job. But we reached a really good working relationship. He has excellent ideas; he's funny. It would be nice if we spoke the same language. No, we actually do speak the same language. It's not Italian or English: it's images.

—And your relationship with Giuseppe Rotunno?

—His sense of light is fantastic. He has reached the stage where he's so good that he concentrates on fine points like one-tenth of one per cent difference. I don't think he is used to someone like me, unfortunately. He has worked with more controlled directors. On the other hand, he has worked with Fellini, but Fellini plays in a different way. Fellini does have total control of the thing and I keep wanting just to be one of the team members. And Peppino wants me to be God.

—Is one influencing the other more?

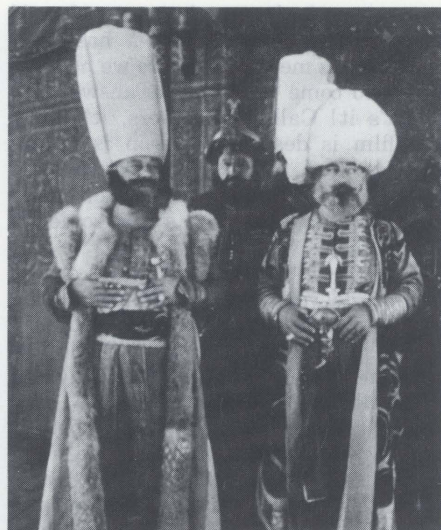
—No, because he is making it as beautiful as I want it to be. I get frustrated because I want it to be beautiful, but I also want it to be fast. And Peppino gets frustrated because he wants it to be beautiful and he will hold out to get it the way he feels it should be. So in a way he benefits me enormously because he is holding out for what I really want, but how this actually works with the schedule is something else. On the one hand, I have to get the thing done in the time and money available, and on the other hand, I want it to be an incredibly beautiful thing. Much of the time, what we are doing is telling cheap jokes, but they are dressed so beautifully they don't look like cheap jokes any more.

There's one scene in the destroyed city, and the little girl's father in the film is a theatre manager and he wears

this great long blue dressing-gown. Standing in front of the theatre, he is desperate because she has disappeared. There are bombs falling everywhere, and the group of actors is around him and the little girl appears and he rushes out to get her. Now what happens, one of the actors steps on his robe. It's sort of a cheap comic thing, but somehow because everything is so beautiful and stunning-looking, it's wonderfully funny, whereas it would only be a titter otherwise. I quite like that. I think that's what a lot of it is about. You can tell the same joke, and if it's done like *Revenge of the Nerds*, nobody will think it's funny, it's just crummy. But if you actually surround it with beautiful costumes and sets, brilliant lighting, you set this stage and then you have this silly little thing happen; it moves up to another level. It's very strange, the way it works.

You lead the audience in one direction, their expectation is going, 'It's beautiful,' and then suddenly, whoops, somebody trips. Slips on a banana skin. It's the same old thing except you have been raised into a different world where it happens. It's funnier when it happens to the gods than when it happens to the man in the street. I think all Greek myths were based on this.

D.M.: The post-production and effects work is going to be handled in England?
T.G.: Yes, I'm bringing the model shooting back to England, though in a way I am going to miss Rome. But we will put it all in one place, so that I can keep working with the editor and keep an eye on the models. That's the part I really like, doing that. It'll be a smaller group of people, we'll have more control. David Tomblin, the Experienced One, said that it was one of the most complicated films he had ever seen. And to choose to come to Italy is a very bizarre thing to do. The Americans and the British are really the only ones with the necessary experience to make this sort



Men in hats ... Photo: Sygma.

of film. Trying to make a difficult film, plus trying to invent a new system, plus trying to work with new people ... I don't know what possessed me.

—Do you have anything to look forward to after *Munchausen*?

—Death. Always an optimist.

It's the first time I never actually had another thought in my head about what to do next. This may cure me of filmmaking, for all I know.

—What else would you pursue?

—I think it would be nice just to do something smaller with a group of people that I feel close to. But my real problem is that I am caught with these images that I want to put on film, and they're very complicated, expensive things.

Actually, one of the things that came out of this is that we have been doing a lot on this stage with sets that are just painted sets, and it looks wonderful. I keep thinking that I want to make a film which is like that—everything painted. It's totally artificial and yet totally credible. So it will really be my animation and live action put together. On this film, I wanted to do the things that Disney did on his big cartoons for real. And we're still doing it in a sense; it has a bit of that feel to it. The stuff we did on the stage was interesting because it was so effective, so magical in a way I haven't seen very often. And it would be nice because it could be done cheaply. You just paint things, you do false perspective things.

—That's similar to what Méliès did.

—It would really be exactly what he did in that sense, only a modern version of it. It bridges theatre and cinema because it's artificial and yet believable. And people are so literal now and so into naturalism or realism. Theatre and cartoons have always been abstract things. Films are abstract but people think they're realistic or naturalistic; people seem to think you have to have things that look real to be real.

I think that might be the next way to work. Really cheap. The cheapest film ever made. ■

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen will open in Britain in spring 1989.

The Turks attack ...



concentrated effort to will the television Western back into existence. Admittedly, some of the productions completed sound more like attempts to embalmm the Western than revive it: one has screened a TV-movie remake of *Red River*, with ex-Gunsmoke star James Arness in the John Wayne role and Bruce Boxleitner in the Montgomery Clift part. They also spent \$2.5 million on a TV-movie entitled *Gunsmoke: Re-turn to Dodge*, hoping to resurrect the longest running television Western of



Go West.

END OF THE TRAIL ?



As long ago as 1911, a writer in the trade journal *Nickelodeon* dismissed the Western as 'a gold mine that has been worked to the limit.' In 1918 the *New York Times* film critic, reviewing a William S. Hart Western, complained: 'that kind of photoplay has been done almost to death.' In 1929 *Photoplay* pronounced, after Lindbergh had flown the Atlantic: 'Lindbergh has put the cowboy into the discard as a type of national hero. The Western novel and motion picture heroes have slunk away into the brush, never to return.'

The belief that the Western is played out has been around almost as long as the genre itself. This alone should make us wary of assuming that its present decline is terminal. *Photoplay's* 1929 claim that the Western had become outmoded appeared prescient for a time. It's true that thanks to the invention of the double-bill, with a consequent demand for second features, the B-Western boomed in the 30s. But during the first half of the decade there was, for whatever reasons, a marked decline in the production of A-Westerns by the major studios; so much so that by 1935 virtually none was being made. Yet at the end of the decade production revived, as a result of the success not only of *Stagecoach* but also of Fox's outlaw cycle (beginning with *Jesse James* in 1939) and two DeMille hits for Paramount, *Union Pacific* (1939) and *North West Mounted Police* (1940).

Nevertheless, the decline in the production of Westerns to the present low point, where production has all but

ceased, is unprecedented. The received wisdom is that the catastrophic box office failure of *Heaven's Gate* in 1980 killed off the genre at a stroke. In truth, the Western was ailing for a long time before that. A marked decrease in the number of Hollywood Westerns occurred as far back as 1954, when figures dipped from nearly a hundred a year to under seventy. By the early 60s the figure had dropped to below thirty. For a time in the late 60s the spectacular explosion of the spaghetti Western dis-

Edward Buscombe on the decline of the Western

guised the underlying trend, but by 1977, a full three years before *Heaven's Gate*, Hollywood production had slumped to a mere seven Westerns. From 1910 until the end of the 50s, year in, year out, around 25 per cent of all films produced in Hollywood had been Westerns. Quite suddenly, it seemed, the genre was relegated to history.

There is no shortage of explanations; the problem is to know what weight to give any of them. There is a persistent tendency to understand cinematic development by means of a variety of organic metaphors. The Western is likened to a tree or a flower: the seed is planted, it grows to maturity, withers

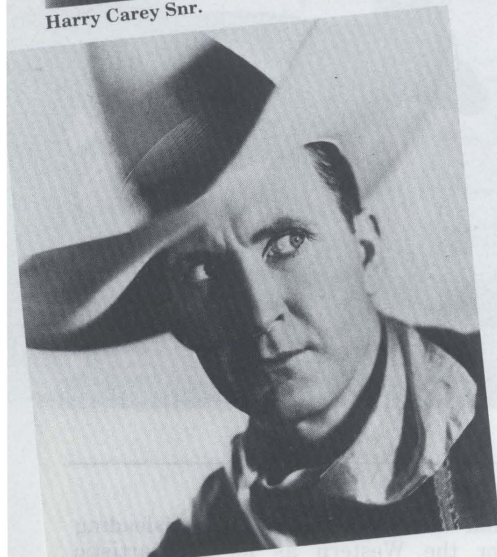
and dies. But this is as misleading for the Western as for any artistic phenomenon. Growth has not been continuous, each new development emerging naturally and vigorously out of what went before. There have been many false starts (for example, the short-lived cycle of horror Westerns in the mid-60s), much retracing of steps (Andrew V. McLaglen's attempt to revive the Fordian tradition). If the organic metaphor is applicable at all, we might speak more appropriately in terms of one genre being grafted on to another (the musical Western) or hybrids being produced by crossing foreign strains with native stock: Hollywood plus the spaghetti Western produces an early Clint Eastwood picture like *Hang 'Em High*.

In truth, it does not much help to see the Western as a living thing inevitably destined to decay and die, any more than we derive useful insights from such aphorisms as 'all good things come to an end'. For this only begs the question, why, if the Western has to come to an end, should it be now, rather than at any time in the past fifty years—or in the next fifty? A more promising line of enquiry would be to look at the basic economics of the industry. Hollywood has stopped making Westerns because they don't make money.

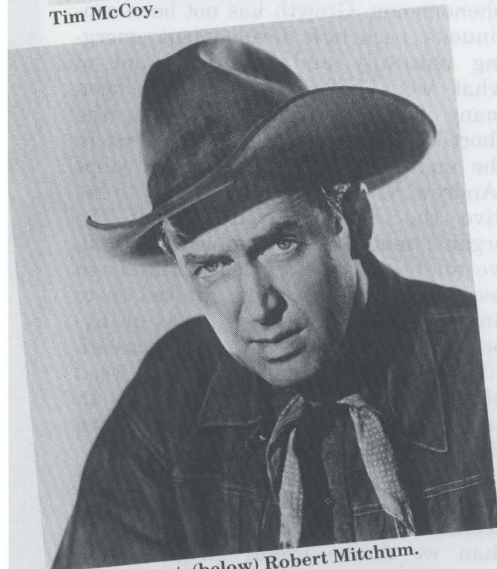
It's important to distinguish here between general popularity and a more particular profitability. The Western in the larger sense hasn't gone out of fashion (though clearly the precise ways in which it is fashionable have



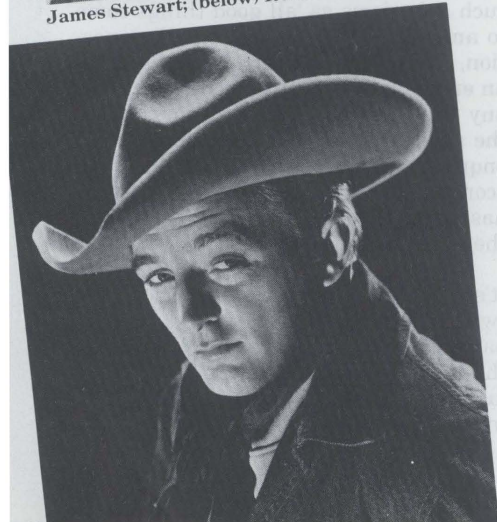
Harry Carey Sr.



Tim McCoy.



James Stewart; (below) Robert Mitchum.



changed). Country music (aka Country and Western music) is booming. Advertising, always quick to shuck off a loser, has stayed with the Western, whether played straight (as in the Marlboro man) or knowingly comic (as in the Alan Whicker commercials for Barclaycard). Bookstores, at least in America, remain well stocked with Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour and their epigones. The flood of books on the history of the West shows no sign of abating. 'Serious' literature is flourishing too; no one who has read Larry McMurtry's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lonesome Dove*, published in 1985 and soon to appear as a tv miniseries, is likely to think that as a subject for fiction the West is exhausted. In Britain and America old Westerns are still regularly replayed on television, and the Christian Broadcasting Network in America has been using old tv Western series to build itself not just an audience but a distinctive identity.

It's not that no one wants Westerns any more. It's rather that for most of the 1980s Hollywood hasn't believed there were profits to be made in producing new ones. This may be only a superstition, but since it would cost several million dollars to prove it wrong there has been an understandable reluctance to dip a toe in the water. Though *Heaven's Gate* may be unfairly blamed for causing the Western's demise, it undoubtedly frightened a lot of people in the industry. At the time of its release some self-righteous critics got carried away with indignation at the mere thought of it costing \$35 million or so. This was to miss the point. It wasn't the outlay that was disastrous, but the income. It was the film's almost complete failure at the box office, so complete that this became a news story in itself, that frightened Hollywood.

Yet the film business has a notoriously short memory. Sooner or later, it seems, someone will always try again. The history of all true film genres (the Western, the musical, the horror film, science fiction), as well as quasi-genres such as the melodrama or war film, has always gone in cycles. Cinematic trends are continually in a state of movement, from boom to bust or back again. Film genres, in fact, illustrate more convincingly than many other areas of economic activity the Marxist dictum that the rate of profit tends inexorably downwards. Invariably the industry exploits the last box office smash to the hilt, usually until well after the law of diminishing returns has set in. (What keeps the industry buoyant is that while profits fall in one production line, they can be depended upon to rise in another.)

Eventually the decline in popularity bottoms out and the cycle can begin again. History (and perhaps also common sense) therefore suggests that a revival of the Western may still at some point be anticipated. And indeed optimists may, if they look closely enough, find some grounds for hope. Within the last year there have been signs of a

concerted effort to will the television Western back into existence. Admittedly, some of the productions completed sound more like attempts to enshrine the Western than revive it. CBS has screened a tv-movie remake of *Red River*, with ex-*Gunsmoke* star James Arness in the John Wayne role and Bruce Boxleitner in the Montgomery Clift part. They also spent \$3.5 million on a tv-movie entitled *Gunsmoke: Return to Dodge*, hoping to resurrect the longest running television Western of all time. *Bonanza: The Next Generation*, from LBS Communications, tries to work the same trick on another highly popular series. Burt Kennedy, with several successful television Westerns to his credit in addition to such cinema hits as *Support Your Local Sheriff!*, recently directed *Once Upon a Texas Train*, reuniting such stalwarts as Angie Dickinson, Richard Widmark, Chuck Connors and Jack Elam.

Not all forthcoming television Westerns are revivals. *Longarm*, for ABC, and *Gunfighter*, co-produced by the British company Primetime, are pilots which are intended to develop into long-running series. Cinema films seen in the last twelve months include *Young Guns*, a kind of Brat Pack version of the Billy the Kid story, with Charlie Sheen and Emilio Estevez; *Sunset*, a Blake Edwards film set in Hollywood in 1929, with James Garner playing Wyatt Earp and Bruce Willis as Tom Mix; and *Dead or Alive*, an rtc production with Kris Kristofferson. In all, *Variety* estimated last December, there were as many as 27 Westerns in production or preparation for television or theatrical release (though to put things into perspective, in 1959, the peak year, there were 48 Western series running on American television and 39 theatrical releases).

☞ *Heaven's Gate:*
It wasn't the outlay
that was disastrous,
but the income ☞

So far, the response of critics and audiences to such of these productions as have been released suggests that hopes of a renaissance are premature. There are good reasons for this. First, if we look at the traditional audience for the Western, we can see that it differs markedly from the audience profile for contemporary cinema and television. Though Hollywood in its heyday did little serious audience research, such evidence as is available indicates that the audience for Westerns was more male than female, more rural than urban, and that while Westerns were popular among boys, they tended to grow out of them during adolescence and return as adults.

As everyone knows, since the 60s the cinema audience has been largely composed of teenagers and young adults, and overwhelmingly urban. In 1984 teenagers comprised one-third of the

box office in America. This proportion has dropped a little because the population as a whole is getting older. But production policy is still chiefly geared to catering for those aged between 15 and 30. As far as television is concerned, the influence of audience demographics in the 1970s seems to have been a major force in the rapid decline of the television Western. Once advertisers realised, as the result of more sophisticated audience measurement techniques, that they need no longer go simply for the highest aggregate viewing figures, and instead could target the higher-spending fractions within the total audience, Westerns, which appealed primarily to the very young, the old and the (probably poorer) rural population, were on their way out.

Already the nihilism of Peckinpah and Dirty Harry looks a little old-fashioned . . .

Of course there was another option. You could try to adapt the Western to appeal to the teenage market. And indeed this was attempted in the early 70s with films like *The Cowboys* and *The Culpepper Cattle Co* and television shows like *Kung Fu*. Yet somehow it never convinced. Youth in the Western, even in these Westerns, always appears callow, always in need of instruction by its elders and betters. It's not surprising that once the teenage market had the strength to impose its tastes the Western was one of the first casualties.

Then there is the nature of the genre itself. At the heart of the Western has always been the culminating act of violence. The final physical struggle has, traditionally, been both aesthetically and morally necessary: only in an act of bravery can the hero bring to a satisfying closure the fight of good against evil. But by the early 70s both the morality and aesthetics of the Western were under pressure. Sam Peckinpah, uncannily sensitive to such changes in sensibility, prefigured these shifts in *The Wild Bunch* (1969). The Western hero's commitment to a social ideal, to a community, or even to his own moral integrity, no longer carries conviction. It has dissolved into a self-destructive nihilism. Consequently the act of violence which must conclude the narrative becomes detached from its moral necessity and rapidly evolves into a purely visual spectacle, fantastically elaborated in a bravura display of special effects and editing technique.

Under pressure from such diverse influences as the reductio ad aesthetics of the spaghetti Western, and the audience's experience of watching the Vietnam war on television, the Western attempted ever more graphically to show the 'reality' of violence. Often these attempts were offered as prophylactics against a perceived spread of violence in contemporary society. But

the audience showed every sign of becoming addicted to the medicine; gradually, the appetite of the youthful audience for the thrills of watching blood spurt and flesh tear grew by what it fed on.

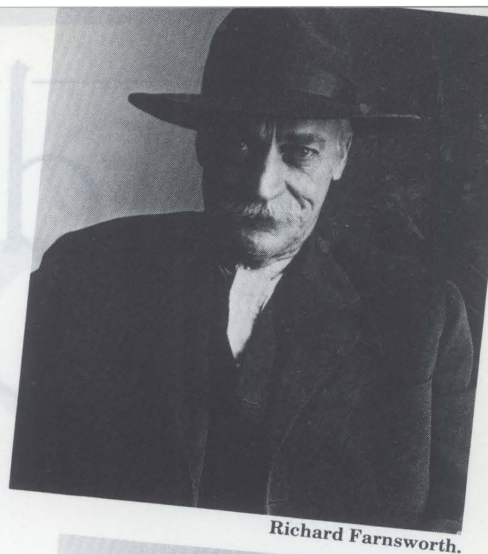
The problem was, as Richard Slotkin notes in *The BFI Companion to the Western*, that the roots of the Western in a particular historical setting proved a handicap to film-makers who wished the depiction of violence to be restricted only by their own imagination. 'The Western imposed too many limitations on the formal elaboration of pure violence . . . For one thing, the Western cannot escape its specific historical associations, and these impose clear limits on firepower and technique.' The increased incidence of such modern inventions as the Gatling gun and dynamite in Westerns of the 70s shows the film-makers' desire to force back the limits which history, in the form of the six-gun and the rifle, inconveniently imposed. Inevitably, though, the Western lost out to horror films and science fiction, which imposed no such restrictions.

Slotkin also argues that 'the Western as a genre has been linked for so long to a specific set of traditional ideological structures that there are real limits to the movie-maker's freedom of abstraction and formal play.' In the course of the 70s, the hero became increasingly a loner, ill at ease with his traditional attachment to community values. In Clint Eastwood's Westerns the hero is increasingly distanced: physically and emotionally withdrawn from the world (*The Outlaw Josey Wales*); whimsical and unworldly (*Bronco Billy*); or mystical and otherworldly (*High Plains Drifter*, *Pale Rider*). Yet a vestigial social responsibility remained. This ideological baggage, all those obligations to defend the weak, build up the community, uphold the rule of law, still obstinately adhere to the formal structures of the Western.

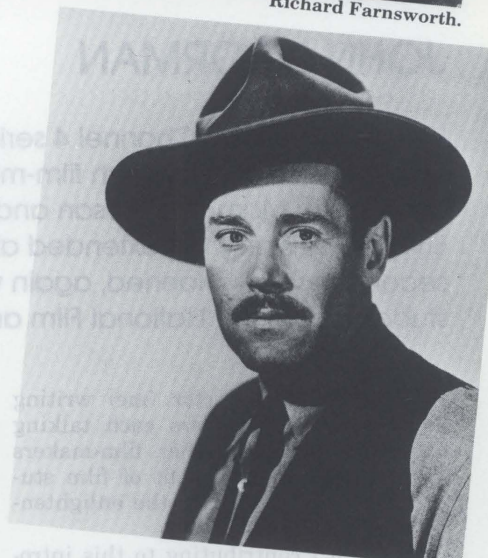
Peckinpah showed that you could make Westerns with nihilists as heroes. But once all social obligations have evaporated, once the ideological and moral underpinnings have been debunked, it is soon apparent that the genre has become irrelevant. A cinema that prefers Dirty Harry, the alter ego of the Eastwood Western persona, no longer needs the Western. And once the social significance has gone, the aesthetic structure that remains is a mere empty shell. As the spaghetti Western showed, the action all too rapidly descends into farce.

And yet . . . Film criticism can't predict the future (which only goes to show how far it is from being a science). The raw material available to the Western is nowhere near exhausted. Already the nihilism of Peckinpah and Dirty Harry looks a little old-fashioned. Are there a few twists in the trail yet? ■

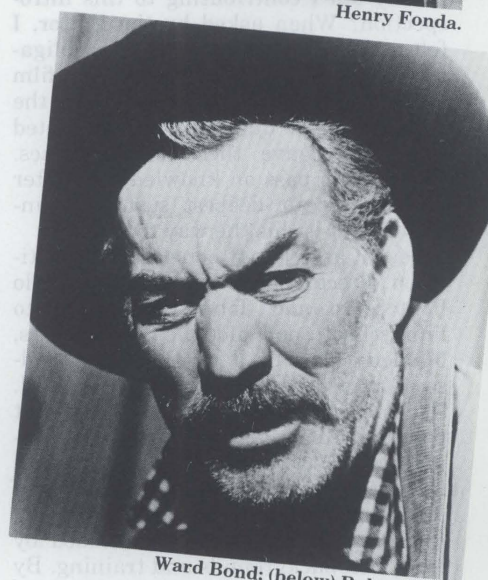
Edward Buscombe is editor of 'The BFI Companion to the Western' (André Deutsch in association with the BFI, £19.95), to be published on 13 October.



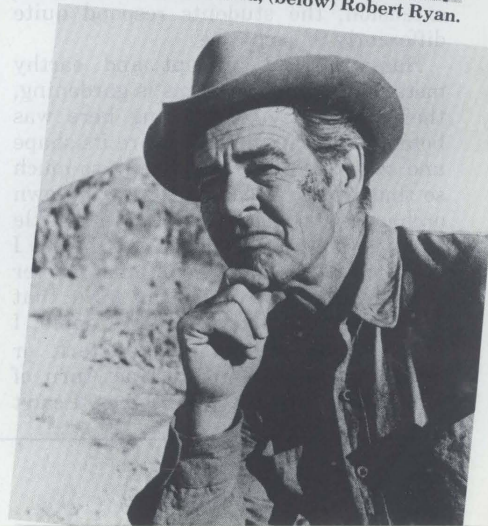
Richard Farnsworth.



Henry Fonda.



Ward Bond; (below) Robert Ryan.



Gardening Botany

JOHN BOORMAN

Reflections on the Channel 4 series of Movie Masterclasses conducted by three British film-makers. The programmes, devised by Mamoun Hassan and directed by Peter West, are British television's first extended attempt at film analysis. A second series is planned, again with the participation of students from the National Film and Television School.

Here is a film director (me) writing about three film-makers each talking about the work of other film-makers apparently for the benefit of film students but ultimately for the enlightenment of a tv audience.

Why am I contributing to this introspection? When asked by the Editor, I felt a prick of conscience and an obligation to support the teaching of film, film students, film culture. I am sure the same sense of duty is what prompted those who gave these masterclasses. The urge to pass on knowledge is, after all, one of our deepest sustaining instincts, but is this the way to do it?

So far as I know none of the scrutinised directors, Akira Kurosawa, Gillo Pontecorvo and John Ford, went to film school, nor did their examiners, Mamoun Hassan, Jack Gold and Lindsay Anderson, nor for that matter did I. The programmes raise questions about training film-makers and about teaching film literacy, but I was most of all intrigued by the film-makers' choice of films and how their widely varying teaching methods were conditioned by their own backgrounds and training. By extension, the students respond quite differently in each case.

Hassan found an apt and earthy metaphor. If making films is gardening, then what they were doing here was botany. I see an apple, admire its shape and colour, I bite it and like it, so much so that I plant seeds and grow my own orchard, make mistakes but learn little by little how to tend apples. If before I am allowed to plant seeds I must master the physical and chemical laws that govern the metabolism of the apple, I may be too intimidated to start; or worse, be of such an abstract turn of mind that when the time comes, I can't

manage the spade and watering-can.

Most film students I meet say that film school offers the chance to get their hands on equipment and make their own movies. They are sceptical about the teaching and theory. Most of them arrive cinema-illiterate. William K. Everson, when he teaches at New York University Film School, screens a silent classic or even a film of the 40s and finds the students astonished to discover a history. Despite being the dominant art form of the twentieth century, film is hardly taught in schools, so is rediscovered by each generation, which plunges popular cinema through recurring cycles of primitivism and sophistication. In the United States students are seldom listening to their tutors, having half an ear cocked to Hollywood. They want to acquire the Spielberg skills of audience manipulation. They want to discover the rules of script construction favoured by the big studios. The other stuff—the theory, the history—is just vamping till ready.

In continental Europe film schools tend to reject commercial cinema, which they see as American cultural imperialism, yet they also secretly yearn for Hollywood and they resolve this contradiction by adopting as a hero some American movie-maker who has himself been neglected or rejected by Hollywood, Sam Fuller for instance. . . . Munich had Nicholas Ray. Yet, curiously, the films that come out of those schools bear little resemblance to the work of their gurus.

From left: *My Darling Clementine* ('Innocence alive in the film but lost to us'); *Seven Samurai* ('separate and connecting levels' in a Kurosawa composition); *The Battle of Algiers* ('How would Jane Fonda have done it?').

Cinema academies are very serious affairs in the Soviet bloc, as befits Lenin's edict about the central position of cinema in a Marxist state. Recently we have read of the passionate debates of Tarkovsky and his fellow students on the nature of poetic cinema. In Prague Milan Kundera was one of Milos Forman's teachers. Imagine Iris Murdoch going down to Beaconsfield. Inevitably, film schools reflect the film culture that supports them, so it is no surprise that in Britain they are uncertain and confused.

I get a lot of letters from young people asking me how they can become film directors. Seldom, if ever, do they say: 'I have a film or films I feel compelled to make, can you tell me how to acquire the skills to realise them?' They mostly just want to be film directors. Film attracts people with artistic temperaments who lack the gifts to paint, compose or write. There is no one more dangerous than an artist without talent. Perhaps this is why I feel uneasy when I give a talk or class at a film school and why I do it so seldom. Most student films are depressingly well achieved, technically, and usually devoid of daring or originality.

In Britain the keepers of the craft are the great technicians, the cameramen, the art directors, the editors, who have learned their skills as apprentices to masters. In them resides a continuity of wisdom which reaches back to the beginnings of film. It is these craftsmen who nurture and nourish one director after another, and often make their reputations. The class system being what it is, very few editors or assistant directors or camera operators are ever given the chance to direct. They are thought of as good NCOS. John Ford was a propman. I can't think of a propman



becoming a director in England. However there are several I know who are subtle, inventive and know everything about making movies.

Jack Gold learned his craft as a film editor. It is evident in the way he teaches his class, using *The Battle of Algiers* as his sampler, and his is quite the most successful of the three Channel 4 programmes. His Socratic style obliges the students to dredge the answers out of themselves. What are Pontecorvo's intentions? How does he achieve them? Sequence after sequence, Gold gets them to focus on the staging, the editing, the use of music and to discover how it is all done, making them speculate on alternative techniques. I was apprenticed to a great film editor, Brian Lewis, and watching Gold I was reminded of him—the complete mastery of technique, combined with an imaginative sensitivity to the subject.

At the end of a crowd scene, Pontecorvo's camera closes in on a character while at the same time the music opens out and becomes fuller. 'Why does he do that?' asks Gold. 'To universalise the experience of the character,' says a girl student adroitly. Constantly Gold asks why the director did this or that. 'He is making a decision for complexity, rather than simplicity,' comes one impressive answer.

There is a scene where Algerian girls are planting bombs. They are non-actors. What do the students think of their expressions in reacting to the people they are about to blow up? 'How would Jane Fonda have done it?' he asks. Was Pontecorvo able to get what he needed from these non-actors? Would more have been better? In a very specific way, he is raising fundamental questions that have exercised film theorists from Eisenstein on.

Jack Gold comes from that craft tradition and passes on his knowledge in the traditional manner, treating the students as apprentice craftsmen.

Mamoun Hassan chooses *Seven Samurai* and presents it reverentially as the great masterpiece it is. His approach is aesthetic, and he talks of 'planes of action', of how Kurosawa's compositions divide themes and stories into separate and connecting levels. He speaks of Kurosawa's use of landscape and weather to externalise the emotions of the characters or to express their conflict. It is certainly a botany class. He reveals layer after layer of complexity. The students confronted by all this, understandably, contribute only awe and amazement.

How discouraging *Seven Samurai* must be to a student. Kurosawa manages to express complex emotions in terms of action. He even externalises the feelings of the villagers by having them behave in ways they never would in reality. It is the most expressionist film ever made, every scene a metaphor. Hassan touches on technique in only the simplest and most obvious ways: Kurosawa's use of movement across the frame to create a dynamic, or how he cleverly conceals the cut when he wishes or draws attention to a cut for emphasis, or his use of slow-motion.

Hassan is the priest offering the chalice and the murmuring inarticulate communicants sip the wine and wonder if they will ever be able to make such a film.

Lindsay Anderson chooses *My Darling Clementine* as the film that 'had the strongest immediate effect on me'. The excerpts he shows do possess the elegiac qualities he claims for it, but how it pales beside *Seven Samurai*. It has Ford's incomparable compositions, his

feeling for horses and landscape, but creaks and groans under the weight of Western clichés and Hollywood stereotypes. The students are sceptical of Lindsay's claims, and he defends the film wearily. You suspect he has mostly forgotten why he felt so passionately for it at the time. To illustrate his claim that Ford is the Shakespeare of the cinema, he unwisely shows Victor Mature as a consumptive Doc Holliday reciting a soliloquy from *Hamlet*. Linda Darnell's close-ups are lit and gauzed as though from another movie. Ford lets all this go and concentrates on making marvellous moments with Henry Fonda.

Under pressure from the unbelieving students, Anderson points out that Ford believed in this set of simple verities which is why the movie works, but from their sceptical faces the students are far from convinced. One of them suggests that Ford is yearning for the lost innocence of the past. Defending his position, Anderson delivers himself of an inspired thought. 'Is it lost innocence,' he asks, 'or is the innocence alive in the film but lost to us?'

We can see how Jack Gold's own films connect with Pontecorvo's, but with Anderson's marvellous movies from *Free Cinema* to *The Whales of August*, Ford's techniques and aesthetic seem not to coincide at all. With Anderson, as with so many film schools, the gap between gardening and botany is wide indeed.

How do these Movie Masterclasses connect to a general audience? I suspect very well. Here are men who know their business talking about other men who knew theirs. That always has a fascination. As for me, I put away the magnifying glass with relief, for I am wanted in the garden. ■



Ferdinand, a new incumbent for this column, weighs in with the advance of the multiplexes, Alexander Walker's latest book and Hitchcock's dullest film.

Yanks in the UK...

Just as tripling old auditoria was hailed as the way forward for British cinema exhibition in the early 1970s, so the spread of multi-screen cinemas is now being seen as the new form of salvation. Multiplexes have been springing up in major towns throughout the country. One catch is that if they do succeed (and the Milton Keynes prototype is said to have recorded a million admissions in its first year), the winners will not be the British film industry but the American companies which are forging ahead in the building and running of the new screens. Names like CIC Theatres, American Multi-Cinema, National Amusements, Warner Brothers, the Canadian Cineplex Odeon and the Australian/American Hoyts Corporation dominate, some with ambitious plans. AMC alone promises 160 screens by the end of 1989, Cineplex Odeon 100 a year later. By contrast, one of the few British participants in the new trend, the Maybox group (linked to the company running London's Curzon cinemas), has already pulled out, overwhelmed by the scale of the opposition and concluding that it was 'too small to compete in the marketplace'. Its Slough ten-screen site was sold to Cineplex Odeon only six months after its opening.

Rank and Cannon have not ignored developments. Rank is due to open two multiplexes late next year and has three or four more planned, each within the context of a larger entertainment complex. Rank argues that its apparently sluggish progress results from the fact that most retail activities offer a higher profit potential, making it hard to acquire sites. This obstacle, combined with the company's well-rehearsed financial difficulties, explains the Cannon group's failure to follow up the Salford multiplex it inherited from Thorn EMI, though at the CEA conference in the spring the company did present models of three proposed new developments budgeted at £17m.

It seems that the Americans are either better negotiators or have inflated estimates of profit potential from their sites. For, despite the success of Milton Keynes and others, the future of the new cinemas is by no means assured. Not all have opened to startling business. Evidence suggests that those in the prospering south (and the southeast already contributes well over 50 per cent of box office receipts) are safe bets but that in areas where unemployment and poverty remain high attendances are considerably lower. It is

significant that Cineplex Odeon have suggested that their plans are largely concentrated around the London area.

There remains the further problem of whether these cinemas create new audiences or merely suck in regulars from other cinemas. Clearly, where the multiplex appears in a previously 'disfranchised area', one with no existing facilities for seeing films, new cinema-goers are being sought. But increasingly they are now being planned and built in towns already served by Rank and Cannon, and even in competition with themselves. It seems highly unlikely that places like York or Cardiff can support two such operations.

Jim Whittell, managing director of Rank Theatres, is one sceptic who fears that the Americans have misinterpreted the statistics. They have seen a steady though slow (about 5 per cent per annum) growth in cinema attendances, and have noted that Britain has fewer cinemas and lower attendances per capita than other European countries. Whittell suggests that they have overlooked the fact that, where there are cinemas, the rate of attendance is actually as high as anywhere else, giving few grounds for believing that there is necessarily a large untapped potential. He fears that badly sited new screens will merely attract customers away from the existing circuits.

The outlook is hard to judge because, unlike the established circuits, the new cinema owners do not reveal their box-

office figures. To the anger of Whittell and his opposite number at Cannon, while Odeon and Cannon attendances at major city cinemas are published each week in the trade press, the Americans refuse to disclose their own performances.

The other factor that has not been seriously studied is the extent to which the new cinemas do actually provide a wider variety of films than their smaller counterparts. The same claim was made for the old triple cinemas, where it rarely proved to be the case. One small auditorium was usually reserved for the continental sex films then in vogue, while the others tended to play the same programmes week after week. There is some indication that a similar pattern is repeating itself and that early high-minded talk of being able to slot even subtitled films into ten-screen cinemas is not being put into practice.

Robert Beeson of Artificial Eye dimly recalls that the Milton Keynes complex did programme *Subway* in its early days, only to report droves leaving the cinema aghast at having to read the subtitles. Rather than try to build an audience for such material, it seems that the company used this one experience as proof that foreign films are box-office death. Apart from the odd late night showing and a tentative booking of *Babette's Feast*, Beeson can report no interest from multiplex programmers. Nor would one expect any if, as Beeson wryly observes, their idea of an art movie is *Mona Lisa*.

Not surprisingly, a swift perusal of programmes over a couple of months at two multiplex sites does not suggest a whole new deal for the cinemagoer. In the first place, the number of new films on screen each week is not that high. At

Tim Robbins in HandMade's *Five Corners*.



High Wycombe, where there are six screens, it seems usual to find four films held over and only two new titles every Friday. At Slough's ten screens the situation is much the same.

Even more striking is the preponderance of American product. At Wycombe in this period the only non-US film was *Crocodile Dundee II*. Slough's larger size allowed the occasional off-beat item like *Prison* or *Hairspray*, even a couple of British films (*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and *A Prayer for the Dying*), plus *The Perfect Murder* and *The Last Emperor*. But the overall picture remains one of dominance by the sort of Hollywood entertainment that has always monopolised our screens as a result of American muscle in the distribution system. It was hard to spot a title that hadn't appeared on Odeon or Cannon screens. The wider choice offered by the new cinemas, if they prosper, seems likely to mean little more than the chance to see the less popular American films as well as the more popular ones.

... Brits in the US

If one were asked to identify the British companies most closely associated with the survival of film production in recent years, one would be certain to include HandMade, Palace and Zenith in any list. It is a little disturbing therefore to notice a common feature of the plans of these companies: all are heavily involved in making films which look more American than British. They appear to have taken to their collective hearts the comment made by a Zenith executive that 'With few exceptions it is

US pictures that do best in the US.'

Thus, undeterred by the *Shanghai Surprise* fiasco, HandMade has already made *Five Corners* with Tony Bill and *The Powwow Highway* with Jonathan Wacks. Even David Leland's new film for the company, *Checking Out*, has been filmed in America, while future plans include a film by Bruce Gilbert, producer of *On Golden Pond* and *The China Syndrome*, and a version of Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*. Palace, a name almost synonymous with the short-lived 'renaissance', have already sent Zelda Barron across the Atlantic for the Hemdale co-production *Shag* and plan *Galatea* to be set in Virginia and *Rage in Harlem* which can only be shot in one place. With its own office in Los Angeles, Palace naturally attracts American projects, in sharp contrast to the days when Steve Woolley toured California disconsolately looking for finance for *Absolute Beginners*. Now Woolley's partner will say no more than that 'We will make films when and where they have to be made.'

For Zenith, originally the movie section of Central tv but now part of the Carlton Communications conglomerate, it is the greater difficulty of attracting the US market for British films that has encouraged the company to turn to American-based projects. The decline of cable and the tightening of video budgets, together with the certainty that the fashion for buying British will not last for ever, have led Zenith to set three of its next five films in the States, having already co-produced Paul Schrader's *Patty Hearst* there. 'That's a happier feeling than trying to do all-British or all-European films.'

Maybe so, and allowing for the fact that all three companies are still

heavily involved in legitimately British pictures, it would be ironic indeed if a healthy British production industry could only be achieved by making American films. And there is not a great deal of evidence (remember the wretched experiences of Thorn EMI not so long ago) that Britons are necessarily the best people to do so.

Walker's way

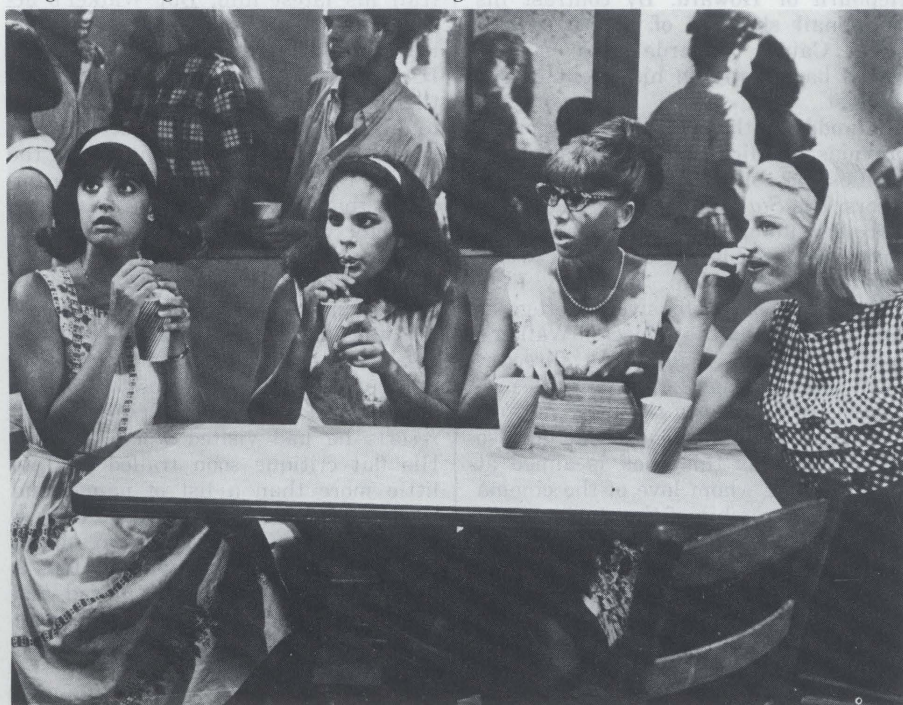
I once tried to interview a number of film critics about the nature of their task. I recall that Derek Malcolm lost my letter (or so he claimed later), that George Melly's physical presence during our session was as undeniable as his spiritual absence, that I met Alexander Walker in the old *Evening Standard* offices and that my line of enquiry made insubstantial headway.

Some fifteen years later appears a book (*It's Only a Movie, Ingrid*, published by Headline) in which, among other things, Walker 'analyses his own craft'—or so it says on the cover. It also describes this, the critic's seventeenth book, as 'his most vivid and personal work'. This may be true, but it hardly means that Walker lets us into too many secrets. He writes, after an encounter with Terence Rattigan, that the latter had 'exposed everyone, but kept himself hidden behind an unruffled exterior.' Walker pulls off the same trick. For the most part he is a voice-off, notebook in hand. Even when we hear of him being swiftly yanked out of the path of a vengeful Robert Mitchum, he remains quizzical and good-humoured (in retrospect at least), appreciative of the joke being played on him by a mischievous Trevor Howard.

'Every book a critic writes is a search for company to share his experiences,' writes Walker. Share his experiences we do, but are rewarded with little of his company, which seems a pity for Walker not only talks to personalities and stars, he is a personality and as near to a star as a mere film critic is likely to get in our uncinemantic culture. Over a period of close on thirty years writing for a London evening newspaper of few up-market pretensions, Walker has consistently produced some of the most perceptive, provocative and downright annoying reviews and columns written here. He has championed those aspects of the British film industry which he values and lambasted anyone he feels has betrayed the medium. He sometimes appears to pen as many letters as reviews and is regularly to be found pursuing one cause or another. He recently stood for election to the Board of Governors of the BFI as part of his campaign against the 'wrong' priorities being followed by the Institute.

This acerbic and uncompromising

Bridget Fonda (right) and friends in Palace's *Shag*.



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DOUBLE TAKES



Alexander Walker with Dilys Powell.

character is not always easy to reconcile with the benevolent figure who glides elusively through the pages of this book. The first, partly autobiographical chapter skims like a flat pebble across the years, touching the surface only occasionally and never breaking through it. Within ten pages his Ulster childhood is over, his years as a student of politics are past and he is already a critic. Thereafter he takes refuge in the role of interviewer and commentator. Yet much the most interesting episodes are those in which he plays a more active part—his account of the politics of film festival jury service, his meetings, away from the formal interview situation, with characters like Olivier, Hepburn or Howard. By contrast his thumbnail sketches of Brando, Guinness, Caine, Bogarde and sundry others barely stretch his talent or our interest.

It's odd too that, just as many of his previous publications are star biographies, he concentrates once more on actors. His *Standard* column may be no place for auteur hauteurs but one might have expected his net to be cast wider between hard covers. The only filmmaker to merit extensive coverage is Kubrick, already the subject of Walker's only full-length study of a director. Even odder, though he writes that 'producers are frequently the most rewarding people to talk to' he never does so here. Obviously this book is aimed at audiences for whom love of the cinema still means worship of the stars, even if they are 'said to be over-reaching, overpaid, lazy, insecure and vain,' as Walker once wickedly suggested to a Guinness-quaffing Peter O'Toole.

Walker concludes his book with a reference to the Borges story about the man who set out to paint a picture of

the world and found himself with a self-portrait. Not much of Walker appears in his own sketches. Perhaps the book's title is more instructive. It's the familiar Hitchcock reassurance to Bergman — 'It's only a movie, Ingrid.' In the text Walker has no truck with that sort of nonsense and concludes that the comment reflected Hitchcock's resentment of the 'efforts made by others to find his mind's construction in his movies.' Perhaps Walker shares this anxiety—though none could possibly suggest that he shares another characteristic that he detects in Hitchcock, a lack of real passion for the movies.

In a rare revealing moment Walker writes, almost sadly, that 'critics... contribute very little to the unhappiness of film-makers', apparently because they lack the power to make or break a film. Whether this is true or not, it remains an aside, leading only to a discussion of publicity. I still don't know how Walker sees the role of critic in the whole complex jigsaw of relationships that make up the art and industry of the cinema.

Brighton Beach Memoirs

At one point in his book Alexander Walker refers to the frustrations of interviewing Hitchcock, an 'interminably tedious' business taken up largely by the great man's retelling of well-worn stories in a delivery of such implacable ponderousness that it was like hearing a record played at half-speed. One rarely gets this impression from books about Hitchcock or from those artful appearances he used to make to trail his latest film. But Walker's accusations will ring true to anyone who has seen a curious 16mm film made by Hitchcock and sent to a film society on the south coast which had written to him. In return, no doubt to great surprise and (initial) excitement, the society received this film. One can imagine the feverish anticipation as the projector was laced, the tension as the lights were dimmed—and the perplexity which followed as the film unspooled.

What appeared was Hitchcock addressing the camera. After opening pleasantries he then embarked on a long and prodigiously boring discussion of his dim memories of various British coastal resorts he had visited when younger. His flat critique soon trailed off into little more than a list of names and brooding silences. Or at least that is how I recall it. Quite what impression it was meant to convey to his eager fans is impossible to imagine. It's a sad and pathetic document that says more about poor Hitch's state of mind than many lengthy tomes.

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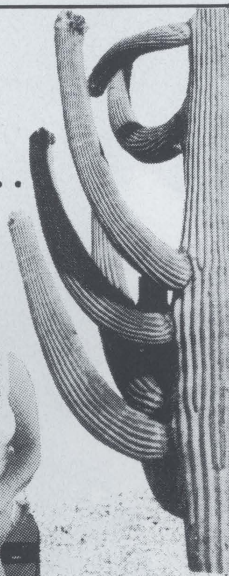
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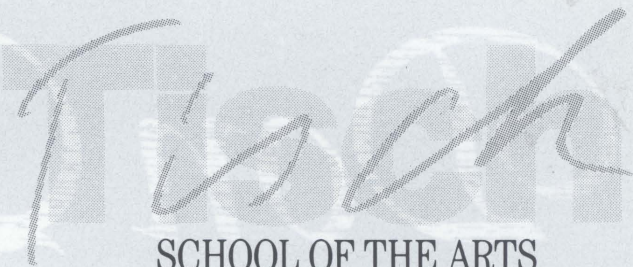
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Sight & Sound Fall '88

Don Quixote



Orson Welles'

— S E C R E T —

Audrey Stainton

A great deal has been said lately about Orson Welles' film of *Don Quixote*. Scraps of it (in pitiful condition) have been exhibited in Rotterdam, Cannes and Barcelona, as if deliberately to confirm the general belief that Welles never finished the film, that he 'wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars' (as Charles Higham wrote in his recent book) on a dream he had not the constancy to complete. But this is not true. Welles' efforts to make *Don Quixote* are common knowledge. How far he succeeded seems not to be known at all.

I worked for Welles, on and off, as his secretary, more or less, throughout 1958 and 1959. I was lucky enough to see some of *Don Quixote* being shot. I typed some of the script, I saw some of the film on the moviola and I have talked at length to some of the others who worked on it at one time or another.

I do not claim to know the whole story. I doubt if anyone does. Not one of his collaborators worked on the film from beginning to end: either they gave up after a while, or he dropped them or left them behind when he moved to a different country. Hardly any of them were allowed to know more than the minimum indispensable to their work and he was often reluctant to tell them even that. Imparting information was against his principles. He once stopped me explaining to a driver where we wanted to go. 'Don't confuse these people's little brains with explanations,' he told me. 'Just wait and then say, "Turn left".'

As a result, the facts concerning Welles are hard to ascertain. He had such a mania for secrecy that he resented any attempt to probe into his thoughts or his life or his work; and he delighted in telling stories about himself that were notoriously, sometimes fantastically, untrue. But of one thing at least I am sure: *Don Quixote* was his passion. 'Il mio bambino,' he used to call it. 'Meet my twelve-year-old child,' he told his young editor, Mauro Bonanni, dramatically opening the big black suitcase he used to carry it around in, the day Mauro started work with him in 1969.

He began shooting it in Mexico City

in August 1957 and struggled on with it in spurts whenever he had enough money to shoot a bit more. It was his own money he was using and he hardly ever had enough. He hardly ever had any. But from the way he embarked on making *Don Quixote*, you would have thought he was a millionaire.

If it had been carefully planned and controlled, in those early days it could probably have been made for about \$100,000. But Welles hated planning and controlling. He launched into *Don Quixote* without a shooting schedule or a budget or a production manager or even a definite script, and just went on and on, first in one country, then another, forced to leave the precious footage in storage here and there every time the money ran out, losing bits of it by the wayside, and above all losing time, year after year of invaluable time, while his actors grew inexorably older and the cost went up and up and up.

Some people say he didn't finish it because he was afraid of completion, but I doubt if Welles was ever afraid of anything. Dissatisfied, yes. It was his perpetual dissatisfaction that was his undoing, his perpetual craving for perfection. 'There's always a better way,' he used to tell another editor, Renzo Lucidi, who was the first to set his hand to the editing of *Don Quixote*, in 1959. And it was in search of that 'better way', in all his work, that Welles would go on chopping and changing, rewriting and recutting, till he had spent more than he or anyone else could afford. Big producers would fire him and sometimes dump the work he had done. Small producers crumpled and gave up. But Welles himself was well-nigh heroic in his persistent, fanatical endeavours to go on with *Don Quixote* year after year after year, when the practical odds against its ever being completed appeared to be rocketing day by day.

Francisco Reiguera Perez, who played Don Quixote, was 71 in 1959. But whether it was the make-up or his acting or because he really had aged beyond his years, he looked exceedingly ancient to me even then. One had the feeling he might die any minute, that his every

shot might be the last. Akim Tamiroff, who was sixty, looked young by comparison, but how many years could he be expected to go on playing Sancho Panza while waiting indefinitely to get paid? 'Where's the money?' he used to groan every now and then, with his wry smile of everlasting resignation, but Welles knew he could count on his loyalty and friendship and that he would not have dreamt of stopping work. Reiguera, who was not a personal friend, may have taken a different view. A political refugee from Spain, resident in Mexico since 1940, he had not had exactly a brilliant career as an actor. Suddenly finding himself, in his old age, playing the part of a lifetime, he thought he was entitled to some money as well as fame.

But one formidable obstacle that stood in the way of completion was the unfinished role of Dulcinea, Don Quixote's idealised lady-love. Those who saw the footage of *Don Quixote* that was screened at Cannes in 1986 noticed that the role (to quote *Variety*) 'was to have been played by Patty McCormack', who appeared nowhere, however, in the scenes shown.

Patty McCormack actually did shoot most of the part, in Mexico City in 1957—when she was twelve years old. Quite a special twelve-year-old she was, too. She had made her debut on the stage at the age of ten, in a Maxwell Anderson play called *The Bad Seed*, and her performance was so outstanding that in 1956 she was called to Hollywood to play the same part in the film based on the play, which was produced and directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Orson Welles spotted her then and cast her as his Dulcinea.

The unorthodoxy of this casting should make it plain that his *Don Quixote* was never a straightforward rendering of Cervantes' book. Though the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza seem to have stepped straight out of Cervantes' pages; though they wear their usual seventeenth-century costumes and their dialogue is substantially Cervantes' own, their adventures take place, not in seventeenth-century Spain, but in the chaotic streets of today. The film begins with



Orson Welles with Patty McCormack in Mexico City, 1957.

Orson Welles himself reading the story to a little girl called Dulcie and, as it unfolds on the screen, we find the bedazzled old would-be knight errant astray in modern times, where he not only mistakes flocks of sheep for armies, but charges into a movie theatre and plunges his sword into the screen, slashing it to shreds in his effort to defend a damsel in distress in the film being shown.

Once Welles' imagination was unleashed on this novel approach to the story, there was no end to the paradoxical situations that sprang to mind. Yet it was Cervantes himself who made Don Diego de Miranda exclaim, 'How can there possibly be knight errants in the world today?'—an exclamation that becomes all the more apt if Don Diego first encounters Don Quixote in our own world of today. And as it is to twelve-year-old Dulcie that the story is being told, it is only natural that she should see herself (in her everyday modern clothes) stepping into the shoes of the legendary Dulcinea and doing her best to help and protect the bungling old knight.

Patty McCormack only vaguely recalls being in Mexico City with this terrifying man, Orson Welles—terrifying, that is, with everybody else, but astonishingly gentle with her. She gained the impression that he related better to children than to adults, which doesn't mean that he didn't drive her crazy by constantly changing the lines she had learnt. She never saw a script, only her own dialogue on loose pages that he kept rewriting and making her memorise all over again. Strangely enough, though she certainly did so, she does not remember shooting any scenes with Akim Tamiroff and Francisco Reiguera, but she does clearly recall that they were both in Mexico, as she was, for two months.

Two months? How's that? Here's a man who is by no means rich trying to

make a film with his own money and he keeps an actress and her mother in Mexico for two months when, according to Patty, he only had her shooting for 'several days'. Patty's mother, Elizabeth Russo (McCormack is a stage name), says he wanted them there a couple of weeks ahead, and that when the fiesta of Independence got too rowdy for their liking, he packed them off to stay in Cuernavaca. Is this the man people say never had a cent in his pocket? Ah, but there are other stories, too, of his pulling out handfuls of cash and giving it away.

Elizabeth Russo quotes an example. One day when there was trouble on the set and the crew were all very tense, she says she stepped in herself and calmed them down, and Orson was so grateful that he pulled out a wad of notes and told her to go and buy herself a hat. 'But I don't want a hat!' she protested. 'Go and buy whatever you want, then,' he said—and she discovered he had given her four hundred dollars. Mrs Russo was enchanted with this episode, but remembering how Welles abhorred interference on the set, especially if it was female, I cannot help wondering whether his 'Go and buy yourself a hat' was as kindly intended as she thought.

The fact remains that he was handing out money without bothering to count it. Evidently he was feeling more like a millionaire than usual. He had been in Hollywood for quite a while, writing and directing *Touch of Evil* and acting in *The Long Hot Summer*, as well as doing a number of things for television, so presumably he thought he was in a position to throw money away. Unfortunately, he was wrong and his extravagance proved disastrous. Exactly what happened I don't know, but it must have been something drastic and unexpected, because foolhardy though he may have been in regard to finance, he was meticulous about whatever concerned his

films. He knew that children quickly change and that it was madness not to complete all Patty McCormack's part. Yet not only did he run out of money before he had done so; suddenly he was in such dire straits that he was obliged to shelve *Don Quixote* for two years and limit himself to earning what he could from assignments such as directing documentaries in Rome for American television.

He also acted in two or three films, but not always for cash. One of them, John Huston's *The Roots of Heaven*, was produced by Darryl Zanuck, to whom Welles owed a lot of money. Having nothing but his services to offer by way of repayment, he agreed to play a cameo role in *The Roots of Heaven* for the token fee of a second-hand moviola worth no more than \$1,000. Zanuck had it taken out of Twentieth Century-Fox's office in Rome and sent to Fregene, on the coast, where Welles then lived. I know this from Signor Pescerelli (of Prevost, the moviola suppliers), who delivered and installed it personally and later went several times to repair it when it broke down. He clearly remembers the shed in the garden that Welles had turned into a cutting room, where I subsequently worked at that same moviola myself. The reason Welles needed the moviola there was so that he could work on the editing of *Don Quixote* during the time he was unable to shoot.

Incidentally, Welles only took the part in *The Roots of Heaven* on condition that he never had to set foot in Africa, where the entire film was being shot. In this he proved doubly wise: not only did he avoid the murderous conditions of Chad, which cost several members of the crew their health and sanity, but the scene he is in, which was shot in comfort at Fontainebleau, near Paris, looks more convincingly like Africa than anything else in the film.

So the whole of 1958 passed and after that Welles went to China to shoot *Ferry to Hong Kong*. He returned to Rome with a houseful of Chinese furniture in the summer of 1959, when he immediately began preparing to resume the shooting of *Don Quixote*.

Patty McCormack was by then fourteen. As it was no use hoping she still looked the same as when she was twelve, Welles found a girl in Rome who bore some resemblance to her and had her dress copied from a photograph by an Italian seamstress. He went so far as to give this girl a screen test, but all that came of it was a very long shot of her on a balcony. How was he to find a girl of twelve who not only looked like Patty McCormack but also possessed some vestige of her talent? Certainly he had no intention of reshooting those early scenes with a different girl, and for the moment he put the problem out of his mind and concentrated on writing the scenes he was about to shoot with Akim Tamiroff and Francisco Reiguera. All he cared about in August 1959 was that he

had them both in Rome and had found a way to finance a few more weeks' shooting.

He had agreed to play the part of Saul in an Italian epic called *David and Goliath*, on condition that he directed his own scenes and shot them after 5 pm for a fee of 5,000,000 lire per night (roughly \$8,000 then). Plus me as his secretary.

I had no wish to be his secretary and he knew it. Looking back, I am as much amazed by his determination to make me work for him as by my own determination not to. This strange tug-of-war between us had been going on since February 1958, when first I was asked to take down some dialogue in shorthand for him from the moviola. Then he started asking me to type things for him—scraps of dialogue, notes, ideas—and though I already had a full-time job as executive secretary and rated mere typing somewhat beneath the level of my capabilities, it was such fascinating stuff that I was easily tempted into doing any amount of it in the evenings. But I steadfastly refused his repeated requests that I drop everything else and work permanently for him.

It seems incredible now that I did not snatch at the chance to bask all day long in the shadow of that frequently obnoxious charmer, that irresponsible, unforgettable giant. But I was young enough then to think genius was no excuse for bad manners. In small doses, he was exhilarating, inspiring, extraordinary, but totally unbearable for any length of time. He drove me berserk with his tantrums, his never doing what he said he was going to do, his ringing up and demanding my urgent presence and then not being there when I arrived, or deciding he didn't need me

after all, or flying into a rage if I said I was too tired to work all night. 'But this is an emergency! She's got to do it!' I heard him shouting at his wife in the corridor one evening when I had been coaxed into coming on condition that it was only for a short while. Paola Welles was doing her best to soften the impact of one of his bad moods, but I could hear him stamping about slamming doors and when she returned it transpired that what he said I had got to do was spend all night at the moviola with him while he wrote the dialogue he was going to shoot next day. I walked out that time, swearing never to work for him again, but my resolution was fairly short-lived, like that of so many other people who walked out on him in despair and later went running back.

Now that the tantrums have faded to irrelevancies lost in the past, I know what a privilege it was to type and retype all those pages, to have the opportunity to watch and learn from the way he corrected and corrected again, shooting out spikes in all directions pointing to new words and new ideas, until the original snippet of text began to look like a hedgehog and it took a certain gift of telepathy to decipher the mess.

All his writing was done in this way, each page a kernel of inspiration. He never began at the beginning of a script and worked through to the end; he went straight to the heart of the drama and gradually developed it outwards from the core. Or lost interest and dropped it almost at once. The curious thing is that he insisted on my using a new carbon for every page I typed. This small but significant fact leads me to wonder if he was more orderly than he allowed anyone to know. Even when he

was finally satisfied with any single page of a script, he would let no one see it. But somewhere, hidden away, he kept an immaculate carbon copy of everything he wrote, a habit in striking disaccord with the legend of a man so untidy that he even lost his own films.

Before long I relented and started typing for him again. I was newly married and had given up my job and the fascination of Welles' writing was irresistible. But to be his full-time secretary, even only on *David and Goliath*, was a different matter altogether. When I persisted in turning the invitation down, the producer, Mimmo Salvi, told me he was ready to pay me whatever I cared to ask, in order to make Mr Welles happy. And as just then I honestly had no room in my life for Mr Welles, I named the giddy figure of \$200 a week, a sum unheard of in Italy in 1959 for a secretary, no matter how high-powered. I was amazed and flattered when Signor Salvi promptly agreed, but then there I was stuck with the job. Or rather the two jobs, because from that moment on, Welles assumed I was working on *Don Quixote* too. In fact, until *David and Goliath* started, it was *Don Quixote* and nothing else.

The first day I found myself on the set of *Don Quixote*, Welles was working out in the wilds, near Manziana. It had been agreed that I was not to join him there until the following day, but then came the usual frantic message, with a car ready to rush me out of Rome at top speed, to where a jeep was waiting to race me over the last lap, across country that got rougher and bumpier all the way. By the time I reached the spot where they were shooting, he had entirely forgotten what it was that he had needed me there so urgently to do. I did nothing that day except comfort Colombina, his miniature dachshund, when she became particularly distressed by the confusion and the heat. But not for anything in the world would I have missed being there.

It was a sweltering day in August and I had come without a hat, never suspecting that, less than an hour from Rome, I would land in the desert. But there it was—if not quite the Sahara, certainly the nearest thing to it: a parched and barren plain that was perfect for the scene where *Don Quixote* attacks a flock of sheep declaring that they are armies, but not much fun for the poor sheep, who, when I arrived, had gone into a scrumage, huddling together with their heads inwards to try to protect themselves from the heat. Sancho Panza's donkey had lain down on its side and looked about to peg out any minute. I got sunburnt just walking across the stretch of ground to where the overheated and by then pretty surly-looking crew was clustered around one umbrella that was shading no one.

The crew, obviously, was not very big. In the course of the years, a number of different technicians worked on *Don*

Patty McCormack as Dulcie.



Quixote with Welles, but in 1959, when he was having to squeeze the most out of every lira he had, he was doing most things himself, with the help of a wrangler and a grip, two drivers and a camera operator. There was neither an assistant director, nor an electrician, nor any lights. Two years later, in Spain, he was able to afford all these things, and also a soundman to record the dialogue, a luxury sadly lacking in 1959, when even his wife (who in *Confidential Report* had played one of the leading parts), had been roped in to act as script girl, cashier and provider of sandwiches, none of which she had ever dreamt of doing before, nor was it, I think, her idea of heaven to be doing them then, least of all for such a merciless taskmaster as her husband.

No sooner had I arrived than we proceeded to have lunch, all crammed into about one square yard of shade behind a haystack: Akim Tamiroff and Francisco Reiguera, Orson Welles and his friend Hilton Edwards of the Gate (renamed the Gaiety) Theatre in Dublin who was to play Samuel in *David and Goliath*, shepherds and sheepdogs, one driver and his car, the wrangler, the grip, the camera operator, Colombina and me. Paola Welles preferred the sun to the flea-ridden look of the shepherds' dogs, who refused to be removed from the only scrap of shade for miles around.

The location Welles had chosen for right after lunch was on the top of a mountain. It was only a small mountain, but perpendicularly steep, almost stalagmite-shaped. Everyone looked askance when we realised he had decided we would all have to clamber up there in that heat. Then we spotted a rival crew setting off to scale the very same peak.

I should explain that the area around Manziana is unusually varied, unspoilt and useful to people making films. You can find practically anything there: mountains and caves, ruins and cliffs, rocks, woods, desert, a stream with a quaint wooden bridge—and not a house or a telegraph pole in sight. The only snag is that it has become a kind of annex to Cinecittà. No crew can count on being the only one in any particular spot.

But it was no use hoping we might now be spared mountaineering at siesta time. Welles set off on his own, announcing that he was going to see if there was room up there for two crews. Quite a vision he was too, sailing solidly upwards, that enormous man in a bright blue boiler suit, with a large straw hat planted on his head and a dainty Japanese sunshade in his hand. 'Orson Welles is about to get lost in a mountain,' Hilton Edwards remarked in his jovial way; and Paola added with a wistful sigh, 'If only he *would* get lost—for a month!'

He didn't. He sent the order back to follow him and we braced ourselves for the climb. The path was not only steep, it was rocky and dangerously narrow—an ordeal for Akim Tamiroff, sweating

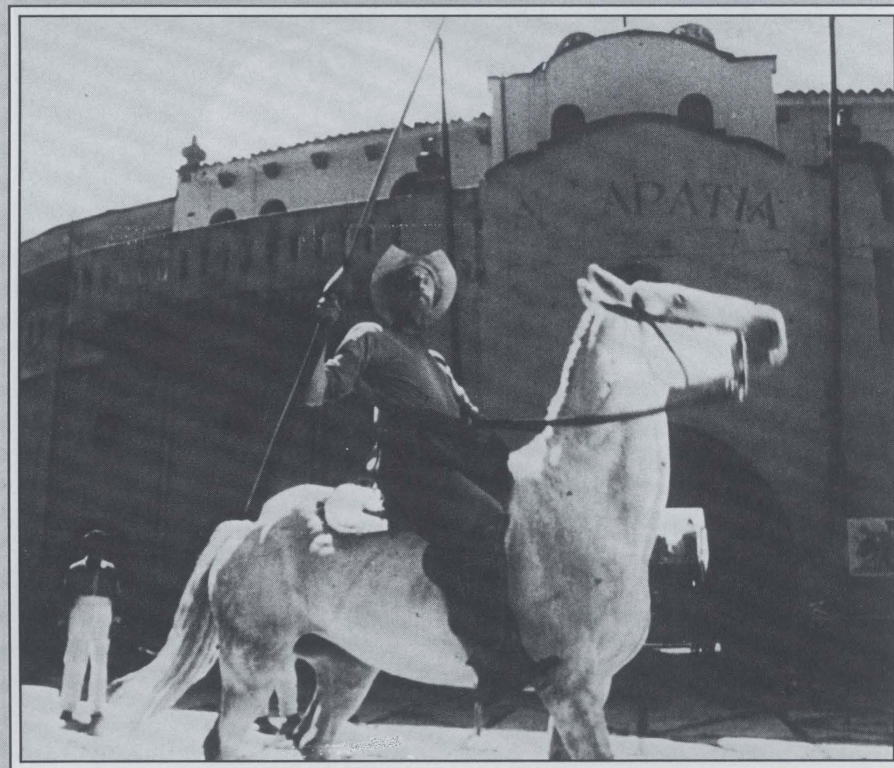
under his Sancho Panza padding and heavy make-up. As for Francisco Reiguera, weighed down by a suit of armour, complete with lance and spurs, it was decided that the only way to get him up there at all would be to sit him on his horse and hope for the best. So between the grip and the wrangler, they hoisted him into the saddle and there he sat, looking frail and helpless and bewildered, as they jogged him up that perilous path with a sheer drop down from the edge. It must have seemed like a nightmare. By the time he reached the top, he was badly scared.

At that point, things took a comic turn. The rival crew turned out to be shooting, not a film, but a 'photo-romance'—one of those melodramatic picture-stories that specialised Italian magazines print like comic strips composed of still photographs instead of drawings, each frame showing the 'actors' frozen in a tableau, with the dialogue in balloons. Fellini's film *The White Sheik* was about a simple girl's passion for one of these photo-romances and its tinsel-and-paste sheik-hero. The hero and heroine we found on our mountain were two beautiful people in improbable costumes presumably meant to be some kind of cowboy and cowgirl. They were entwined in a romantic posture against a background of weird Etruscan caves and a ruined castle. This Piranesi-type decor looked fairly improbable too, but it was not the work of an over-romantic art director; it actually did (and does) grace the top of that mountain and Orson Welles, who planned to use it, considered it nature's own special gift to him. As for the intruders, he simply ignored them and started setting up his first shot as if his contempt had blotted them clean out of sight.

I don't know what the photo-romance people made of it when this voluminous and, I should have thought, eminently recognisable world-famous genius suddenly loomed up over the cliff-side and began shooting a masterpiece bang on top of their own tawdry little tableau. As far as I recall, they did not appear overawed; and they clung willy nilly to their priority rights (and to their modest daily pay) as the ones who had indisputably got there first. They had with them about half a dozen horses, several dogs and a mule. Add to this our own horse and donkey, plus Colombina and ourselves, and it should be obvious that the few square yards available on the top of a smallish mountain was a space quite inadequate to accommodate us all. Since neither side would give way, the two crews were soon inextricably intermingled. In the midst of the chaos that ensued, Orson Welles was lying on the ground with his eye to his Cameflex camera, calmly rehearsing his scene with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, oblivious of the two beautiful cowpeople who were posing for their tableaux only a few feet behind.

Francisco Reiguera looked more dazed than usual that day and no wonder, at his age and in that heat, after being carted around the countryside in full armour, hauled on and off his horse and frightened to death. As he was incapable of memorising a single word, his part had to be written up on huge boards for him to read out, line by line. I don't know if he was a good actor; an old man mouthing words he can hardly pronounce is apt to give the impression that he is not. At the time, I thought Welles' genius was rarely more evident than in the way he transformed that old man I saw on the set into the splendid Knight of the Sad Countenance I saw

Don Quixote outside the bullring.



later on the screen, imbued with all the poetical pathos of Cervantes' Don Quixote. But at the Churubuscu Studio in Mexico City they have preserved a note that Welles wrote to Reiguera, complimenting him on his performance; so perhaps I was wrong in thinking that Welles moulded that performance out of thin air and brought it to life with the magic of his own voice.

Yes, he post-synched both parts himself and he did it superbly, giving Don Quixote a distinguished British accent and Sancho Panza a homelier, more American type of speech. I cannot imagine anyone doing it better, nor who but he could have handled the section he had shot without a guide track. Who but he, carrying the script in his head (for it appeared to exist nowhere else), could have caught the pauses and the

faltering words that Reiguera was seen silently mouthing on the screen and miraculously matched them with his own powerful rendering of the same lines?

On *Don Quixote* his method of post-synching was so unorthodox that it would be more accurate to call it pre-voicing. Mauro Bonanni described the process to me as follows. First, before editing, Welles recorded the dialogue, sequence by sequence, 'wild', which means without screening the film and regardless of the actors' lip movements. In this way, he established the rhythm he wanted his editor to follow in cutting the film. The editor had to adapt the image to the voice, instead of vice versa. Only after this was done and Welles was satisfied with the rhythm of the sequence, would he study the lip movements on the moviola and adapt his own speech accordingly, while recording an improvised guide track of his own on a small Philips tape-recorder.

This, according to Mauro, served as a guide that he used in rehearsing his dialogue in tune with the lip movements he had now established. The next day, when he recorded the dialogue again, he would run over it first with his tape-recorder switched on; then he would switch it off and record from memory, but always wild. Afterwards, he checked the result with the image and if he found anything unsatisfactory he would record it again and again (changing the words, if necessary) until he got it in sync; but Mauro says it was extraordinary how close he could get to perfect synchronisation with this unique method of his.

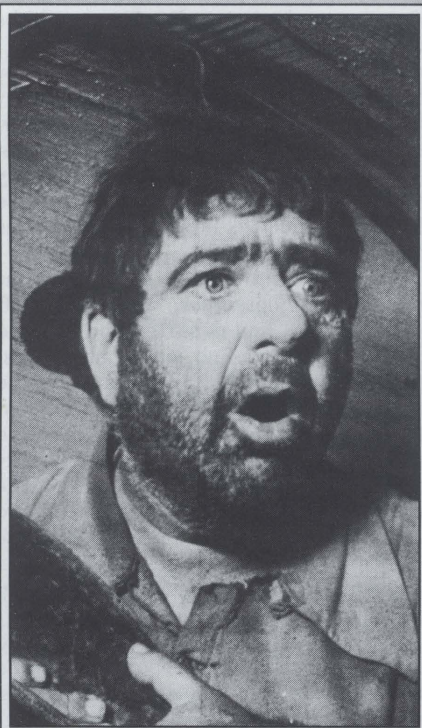
Mauro is convinced that it was entire-

ly for reasons of secrecy that Welles refused to follow the customary post-synching procedure by having loops made and screened. He would allow no one to see bits of *Don Quixote* for any reason whatsoever. He even locked the door of the cutting room when they were working on the editing. For the same reason, he refused to involve outside experts in the execution of opticals. Whether these were speed-ups or slow-downs or any of the devices that modern technology handles with ease, he and Mauro laboriously achieved the required results by hand, removing alternate frames for speed-ups or inserting alternate white frames to slow the pace. Whatever had to be done, they did themselves, so that no one else need enter the enchanted circle.

Small wonder that I know of no one who ever saw a screenplay of *Don Quixote*, only loose pages, like those I typed myself, the ones he was writing and rewriting as he went along, and the post-synched dialogue I took down in shorthand from the moviola. I doubt if he ever bound them together. Why tie himself down?

This loose-page method of his exceeded all limits on *David and Goliath*. Ignoring the Italian screenplay, he just picked up the Bible, had me type out episodes concerning Saul and turned them into scenes—which he refused to hand over to the crew, either before, during or after shooting. The assistant director was in despair at being left in the dark and, seeing his point, I finally yielded to his entreaties and took to making extra copies of those Top Secret pages of pure Bible and furtively handing them over, like a Russian spy in Berlin.

One night Welles caught me doing this and was enraged—as well he might be, I admit, for his scenes made mincemeat of the plot. He had killed off a character who was alive in the final scene (which had already been shot), and made another character turn up alive after he was dead. He had turned a deaf ear when I tried to point this out. Nor did he care if an Italian actor had been hired to play Samuel and had already shot some scenes. The part of Samuel was ideal for his friend Hilton Edwards, and by bringing him over to Rome and making Mimmo Salvi pay him a salary, he was not only giving Hilton some help with his disastrous financial situation, but also giving himself the combined pleasures of Hilton's witty, convivial company and dependably fine performance, together with a chance to discuss their plans for a production at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin of what was to become the stage version of his *Chimes at Midnight*. How many birds can you kill with one stone—and all at Mimmo Salvi's expense? Later he had another idea: to let Francisco Reiguera earn some money by playing the Witch of Endor, a brainwave that wreaked havoc on Salvi's budget and shooting schedule and compelled him to build an entirely new set in another



Left: Akim Tamiroff. Below: Tamiroff, Francisco Reiguera with cumulus clouds.



studio (the De Paolis), since there was no room for it at the Safa Palatino Studio, where the rest of the film was being shot.

Poor Mimmo Salvi was no match for Welles, who took the attitude that anyone who dares involve a genius in a piece of trash can expect to be punished for his impudence. And punished Mimmo Salvi was, with a vengeance. I don't think Welles considered *David and Goliath* a film at all, only a source of finance for *Don Quixote*, and as such to be pumped dry without a qualm in the name of true creativity.

I never saw *David and Goliath* after it was finished, but I understand they somehow managed to make sense of it by cutting and changing the dialogue and reducing it all to the lowest common denominator. On this level it was released, in second and third run cinemas, like any other undistinguished Italian epic. No one pounced on it as a curio. No one appeared to be startled by the effect of routine historical stodge amazingly interspersed, whenever Saul appeared on the scene, with snatches of biblical poetry and low angle photography in the inimitable style of Orson Welles.

But some of it must have been striking, because at first, for a while, Welles gave in to his irresistible urge to do all things well and seemed to forget that he was filming anything other than a deep psychological study of the character of Saul. For several nights he was all smiles; he charmed the crew. They kept on saying to me, 'But he's so nice! What's all this talk about him being a monster?' Indeed, when he wanted to be nice, no one could be nicer. But he soon became bored and as his boredom increased his behaviour got worse and worse.

He was also making unreasonable demands on his exceptional stamina, shooting *Don Quixote* out in the country every day from 6 am until 4 pm and then driving straight into Rome to shoot *David and Goliath* from 5 pm until two in the morning. It then took him forty minutes to reach his home. The fact that this crazy schedule left him with only one or two hours sleep did not, on the face of it, seem to bother him much. In the daytime he was never tired, so driven was he by his love for *Don Quixote*. But those long nights playing Saul were heavy going. To help himself through, he drank a whole bottle of brandy each night, and as the level of the liquor went down, his temper flared up. He would lash out at the slightest provocation, such as when the wardrobe assistant handed him a moonstone ring to wear. 'Don't you know moonstone brings bad luck?' he screamed, hurling the ring to the far end of the sound stage and terrifying the culprit out of his wits. At other times, he would sink into glowering taciturnity and the venom in his eyes would be more frightening than his screams.

Towards the end, he was loathing every moment of what had become a self-imposed ordeal. At the same time,

he was intent on dragging it out. He adopted all kinds of ruses to slow up the shooting, because the more nights it lasted, the more days he could afford to go on shooting *Don Quixote*, thanks to Mimmo Salvi's incautious agreement to pay him five million lire per night, without limitation. He would excogitate complicated set-ups that took two hours to prepare, such as a great tower of scaffolding by virtue of which, while David was playing his harp, he and Saul were inexplicably perched high up in the air instead of on the ground. This had everyone baffled, but the whole crew kept a straight face until Paola Welles came breezing in and said, 'What are you doing up there?' and just for once Welles looked like a little boy caught stealing the jam.

But if he was momentarily fazed by Paola's candour, this did not deter him from having the scaffolding shifted to the far end of the floor for the next set-up. This gave him another two hours in the yard with Akim Tamiroff, who used to spend his nights out there in his Sancho Panza costume, sitting hunched up on a table with a blanket over his head, waiting for Welles to pop out and shoot a few close-ups whenever he could snatch the time.

Welles used to hoard close-ups the way a squirrel hoards nuts for the winter. It is a pity he was not equally provident with his money. But a good stock of close-ups was worth more to him than gold, when his actors were gone and he was sitting at the moviola with nothing to play with but his cans of film.

After *David and Goliath*, I gave up working for Welles. Actually, I collapsed in tears, muttering, 'Never, never again!' at the end of the last long, relentless night. I had tried in vain to point out that, unlike him, I needed more than one hour's

sleep. 'So how many hours a day can you work?' he had asked in a tiredly tolerant tone, as if I was starting a campaign for a thirty-hour week. In any case, we went on exactly as before. My admiration for him remains unbounded, but as an employer he was impossible. There came a time when I could stand his rudeness no longer. 'But he has such a high opinion of you,' Paola protested when I told her so. 'He certainly doesn't show it,' I retorted. 'I know,' she said. 'But you see, he always has to unloose his venom on someone. If it's not you, it's usually me, when I'm around.'

I had quite forgotten this until I read about it in an old letter of mine. There is no trace left in my memory now of the 'rudeness' I complained of then. The image of Welles I retain is of a man devastatingly alone. In his good moods, in company he enjoyed, no one could be wittier or more charming, but what I remember most are his long silences, his impenetrable scowls. I see a solitary man in the back seat of a hired car, driving here and there to collect missing shots one by one, an image recently brought to mind by a driver called Aldo De Luca, who says he worked for Welles for two weeks in 1959.

This must have been after I left, at the end of September, when Tamiroff and Reiguera had departed and Mimmo Salvi's driver was no longer at his disposal. It was Romolo Spada, a man who normally supplied horses, who hired Aldo De Luca to drive Welles out into the country every day, to a place where, alone with his camera operator and the wrangler and one grip, he devoted two weeks to shooting close-ups of the horse and donkey and long shots of *Don Quixote* on horseback, with the wrangler as a stand-in for Reiguera.

After that, *Don Quixote* suffered another two-year suspension while Welles was busy on other things:

Reiguera, Tamiroff and television aerial.



theatre in Dublin and London and acting in films, mostly in France. One film (*The Tartars*), with exteriors in Yugoslavia, brought him back to Rome for interiors in August 1960, when he seized the chance to grab a few extra shots of *Don Quixote* without the actors, or so I am told by Renzo Lucidi's son, Maurizio, now an established director himself, who at that time worked with Welles for about three years. All the shooting of *Don Quixote* was done in August and September, because, as Welles explained to Mauro Bonanni, only then do you see those particular cumulus clouds that are almost a leit-motif throughout the film. He was only once obliged to shoot in July, in order to catch a scene with the bulls running wild in the streets at the fiesta of San Fermin in Pamplona, in Spain.

In the summer of 1961, he summoned Tamiroff and Reiguera to Spain and shot a good deal, with what was for him a sizeable crew. That year he had a soundman, an electrician to assist his Spanish camera operator, Ricardo Navarete, and some days a couple of assistants to help with make-up. He had music recorded for the title background by the guitarist Juan Serano, and he had Maurizio Lucidi as his assistant director-cum-editor, whom he expected, as a matter of course, to do the job of script girl, trouble-shooter and general dogsbody too. If he was still loth to pay his actors, it was only because he thought it more important to spend what had to be spent on basic production costs, in order to shoot as much as he could while the actors were there, rather than hand over cash that, as he

saw it, they could easily do without until he could afford to pay them without jeopardising his chances of finishing the film.

He had still not finished it by the end of September 1961, and in 1962, when he was mainly busy shooting *The Trial*, his work on *Don Quixote* was limited to editing. After that, he moved permanently to Spain and, though I know he continued to shoot *Don Quixote* there, I have nothing precise to report until the end of 1968, when he came back to Italy to start shooting *Shylock*, a half-hour television film that is actually just one section of a seven-part tv special that he shot in Italy, France, Austria, England and the United States, for the BBC.

In 1969 this kept him intensely busy, but in among the constant comings and goings it involved, he spent two days at Civitavecchia (on the coast 48 miles north of Rome) with his camera operator Giorgio Tonti, shooting pan shots of the countryside for *Don Quixote*. These seem to have been positively the last shots of the film. By then Reiguera was 81 and in November that year he died. But Welles was still reluctant to give up. As late as 1970, Giorgio Tonti tells me, he started to search for yet another girl who looked liked Patty McCormack. Had he found one, it would have been a good excuse to shoot some more. If he could have dug Reiguera out of his grave and discovered some potion to rejuvenate Tamiroff, I'm sure he would have gone on shooting new scenes for ever. But alas, that glorious game was over. All he could do now was edit and re-edit what he had shot.

Francisco Reiguera.



Mauro Bonanni worked with Welles as assistant editor from April 1969 until March 1970, ostensibly on the BBC television special, but alternating with spells of editing *Don Quixote*, an experience that has left him with a lasting veneration for Welles and immense nostalgia for the time they spent together in the cutting room.

It came to an end, he tells me, when an Italian magazine published a salacious indiscretion about Welles' private life, with a photograph of his wife, Paola, 'looking sad', and one of Oja Palinkaš Kodar, Welles' constant companion, supposedly looking radiant. Always fanatically jealous of his privacy, Welles dodged personal publicity like the plague. And here was some unknown paparazzo trying to ferret out his emotions, splashing his intimate secrets all over a scandal rag.

His rage was so immense that he decided to leave Italy, taking all his work with him, as a dramatic protest against the insult he had received. Since he was in fact obliged to stay until he had finished the work he was doing, he took care to nip the scandal in the bud by checking out of the Hilton Hotel, putting Oja Kodar on the first plane out of Rome, and installing himself in a dressing room at the Safa Palatino Studio, where he remained for a week, virtually in hiding. He stayed on for another two weeks at the unobtrusive Anglo-American Hotel in Via Quattro Fontane and after that he departed, leaving the cut copy of *Don Quixote* with Mauro. 'I'm entrusting my child to you,' he told him. 'Take good care of him.'

More than a year passed before Welles phoned to say he was sending his sixteen-year-old daughter Beatrice to collect the cut copy. Mauro met her in the late summer of 1971, in Piazza del Popolo in Rome, where he helped her load Welles' big black suitcase containing the cut copy into the trunk of a silver-grey Austin Mini Minor.

Mauro assures me it was a complete film lasting one and a half hours. Some parts of it were not yet post-synched and some parts needed to be revoiced, because Welles had repeatedly changed his mind regarding the editing and inserted different close-ups that were out of sync. There was no music or sound effects. But all the principal photography had been completed; Francisco Reiguera had finished shooting his part long before he died; and Welles had solved the problem of Dulcinea by a masterly combination of close-ups of Patty McCormack and long or half-concealed shots of a girl resembling her whom he had found in Spain.

According to Mauro, the only image lacking was one special effect: a news-reel shot of some spectacular up-to-date event, which Welles intended to add later to the screen of a television set that Sancho Panza discovers in the plaza at Pamplona. Welles told Mauro that if he had added this in 1970, it would have shown the men landing on

the moon, but he preferred to wait, so that what was showing on the tv screen would be highly topical at the time the film was handed over for release. Even then, evidently, he did not expect that to happen soon. 'When I'm finished with it, I'll release it,' he had said in an interview on Italian television in 1964. Not 'when I've finished it,' but 'when I'm finished with it.' He loved playing with it at the moviola, trying it this way around and then that. When was he ever going to stop?

In the meantime, incredible as it may seem, he left the negative lying apparently forgotten in a Rome vault where, but for an extraordinary fluke, it would have suffered the fate of all abandoned material and been destroyed. Luckily, it so happened that Mauro's wife worked at the laboratory in question and in 1974 she caught sight of a letter to Anne Rogers, Welles' one-time secretary in London, informing her that as Mr Welles had omitted to pay long overdue storage costs or communicate with them in any way, and as all efforts to trace him had failed, they were obliged to proceed with the routine destruction of the negative.

Alerted by his wife, Mauro rushed to the rescue, but without authorisation he was not allowed to take charge of the negative, only to pay a cautionary deposit and postpone the destruction for three months. It took him all those three months to locate Welles, but in September 1974 Welles sent a letter authorising him to take the negative into custody. Mauro has been guarding it ever since with loving care, along with the secret of its whereabouts, shouldering the expense of its storage out of his own pocket all these years.

Mauro may be the only person this side of the Atlantic who has seen the whole film, fully edited. His love of it is hard to distinguish from his devotion to Orson Welles, but when asked for his professional opinion, he told me he felt that, after shooting Kafka's *The Trial* in 1962, Welles returned to *Don Quixote* charged with a new excitement generated by Kafka. It was as if from then on he set out to recreate Kafka within *Don Quixote*. That is why nothing in the film is clear or easy to follow. The dialogue is enigmatic and in the editing he deliberately shuffled sequences to create a sense of mystery. 'Think of a jigsaw puzzle,' he once told Mauro. 'That's what I'm trying to do.'

I'm not sure that this approach was really the *result* of his making *The Trial*. I had the feeling myself, even from what little I saw of the film in 1959, that it might be hard for audiences to understand. Though by no means abstruse, it possesses, as Mauro says, the kind of delicate non-clarity that is peculiar to the theatre rather than the cinema. Welles' reluctance to let audiences see it may have partly derived from his dread of the kind of pseudo-intellectual talk that this was liable to provoke.

What is certain is that he was intensely jealous of it, utterly unwilling to let it out of his loving hands. Why should he? It was his. He had made it with his own sweat and blood. He had no commitments to any distributors or investors. There is no law that says a film, once made, must be turned into a public thing that anyone may feel entitled to discuss, any more than there is a law that can compel a father to expose

his son to the ribald remarks of an ignorant crowd. He loathed the theorising of self-important critics, the bombast of 'experts' who think they know it all. What had they to do with his *Don Quixote*, which was intensely private and personal—almost a secret psychoanalysis of Orson Welles.

Besides, he was not a hundred per cent sure that *Don Quixote* was the masterpiece the world expected of him. It had been a very long time since he directed a truly great film and he was almost sure that *Don Quixote* was precisely that. But suppose it was not? Even back in 1959, Akim Tamiroff had said to me, 'this is either going to be one of the greatest masterpieces in the history of the cinema, or the biggest piece of trash ever known.'

Whatever it was, beloved child or favourite toy, he never could bring himself to decide he had finished with it for good. As late as June 1985, four months before he died, he was on the phone to Mauro, inviting him to Los Angeles so that they could have some more fun together with the editing. In other words, he was still engrossed in the passionate problem of editing *Don Quixote* right up to the end of his life.

But if the film is virtually finished, why doesn't somebody say so, one may ask, now that Welles is no longer here to keep it to himself? Well, it is not as easy to say so as one might think. A film is not like a book, with all its pages numbered and 'The End' written irrefutably on the last one. True, its reels are usually numbered, and its shots, and every take on the clapper board. But Orson Welles had a superstitious hatred of numbers; hence his aversion for script girls, with their irritating insistence on counting footage and numbering things. He never numbered anything: neither his scenes nor his shots nor his reels nor his composers' musical themes. Instead, he gave all these things names, such as 'Sheep', 'Television', 'Dreamers', 'False'.

On the clapper board, in place of the title of the film, there would be something enigmatic like 'Q1' or just 'Orson Welles', followed by the name of the take. He did, of necessity, number the takes, but in a manner peculiar only to himself. For instance, the first take of a close-up of Sancho Panza would, logically enough, be marked 'Sancho-1'. But if the second take of the same close-up happened to include a wall, he was liable to mark it, not 'Sancho-2' but 'Wall-1'. Welles himself always knew which take was which, but for others it remains decidedly confusing.

It is only to be hoped that someone, soon, will embark on trying to read Welles' mind in retrospect. Because *Don Quixote* is more than just a beautiful film. Welles wanted it kept secret in his lifetime, but it had become the very centre of his life. It is the truest expression of his own secret person, and if he was a genius, that secret belongs to the world. ■

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Clapper board during the Italian shooting.



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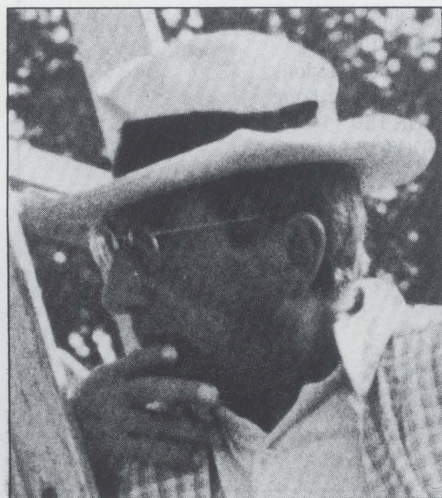
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POLONSKY AND KAZAN

HUAC and the violation of personality

TERENCE BUTLER

Top: Elia Kazan.
Below: Abraham Polonsky.



Abraham Lincoln Polonsky was one of the many casualties of the House Un-American Activities Committee in Hollywood, Elia Kazan a self-justifying collaborator with the same committee; yet their roots in the Communism of the Depression ensure a strong, if contradictory, relationship between their films. Both are central to the political concerns of postwar American cinema. By their time the populism so dear to Frank Capra and John Ford (the little man assailing urban corruption; the independent-mindedness of the frontier) may have been to some degree still culturally pervasive; but such confidence in the power of the people and of the individual was rather misplaced in an America that had witnessed expansion in the big corporations and the spread of McCarthyism.

The work of Polonsky and Kazan is necessarily a search for, as much as an assertion of, value. Each film-maker was led back to an exploration of his—and America's—immigrant prehistory (Polish Jew in Polonsky's case, Greek in Kazan's), the dilemma of HUAC intersecting with that of American identity. For them America was tough, exploitative and—contrary to Horatio Alger myth—took a psychological toll even of those who survived the encounter with it. In such a context HUAC seems not so much an aberration of the American character, involving as it did in the requirement of naming names the setting of self-preservation above personal morality. As Lillian Hellman wrote in one of the less contested statements in her HUAC memoir *Scoundrel Time*: 'The children of timid immigrants are often remarkable people: energetic, intelligent, hardworking; and often they make it so good that they are determined to keep it at any cost.'

Of the two men, Kazan was the first to begin directing films. Yet it was not until after he had named names before HUAC that his work gained force and depth—partly out of his need to account for his changed political position. Kazan's early work is often rather impersonal, too readily revealing the shallow side to the liberalism of pre-HUAC Hollywood—as with *Gentleman's Agreement*, which sees anti-semitism as a matter of individual failing rather than as a social problem. This is not the case with Polonsky: *Body and Soul*, directed in 1947 by Robert Rossen from Polonsky's first solo screenplay, and *Force of Evil*, Polonsky's 1949 directorial debut, are disturbing film noir studies of a

dangerously power-oriented pro-WASP America with little regard for those who have not made it to the top of the heap. In *Force of Evil*'s Bauer, the frightened Jewish small-time gaming accountant who informs to hoodlums and thuggish police alike, Polonsky diagnosed American society as conducive to the informer even as HUAC was barely under way.

Much of the Communist contribution to Hollywood, particularly that of a more direct kind, now seems sadly unprogressive—such as the wartime scripts of CP luminaries John Howard Lawson for *Action in the North Atlantic* and Dalton Trumbo for *Tender Comrade*, CP sloganeering merely working to reinforce the simple-minded populism that all war governments like to promote. If a CP member, Polonsky was not largely out to toe any party line. His scripts are particularly striking in the complex way they examine how social roles influence individual motivation, an achievement arguably only matched among CP screenwriters by Richard Collins in his script for Don Siegel's *Riot in Cell Block 11*.

Indeed Freud seems to have influenced Polonsky as much as Marx; and like the also blacklisted liberal director Bernard Vorhaus (*So Young So Bad*), he sees as a major obligation of society the cultivation of an integrated personality in the individual. *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil* were made under the auspices of John Garfield's short-lived Enterprise studios. Garfield had made his name in the 1930s acting in plays like Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy* at New York's radical and experimental Group Theatre (where Kazan also acted). That Odets was a major influence on Polonsky is acknowledged in the manner *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil* contribute to the Garfield image, the 'poetic realism' of their dialogue and the former film taking its boxing milieu from *Golden Boy*. As with Odets, Polonsky's socialist commitment proceeds from a conviction of the need to overcome the powerfully divisive impact of the drive for material success on American society.

Before his untimely death at the height of the Hollywood witchhunts, Garfield had made his own the character of the *Golden Boy*-type young man tragically alienated from lower-class origins by the drive for success. Moving towards a desperate plea for social justice, *Force of Evil* is particularly memorable in its handling of the

Garfield image. Unable through Jewish origins to attend the right college like his partner in law practice, Garfield's Joe Morse has nevertheless made himself rich working as a prominent hoodlum's lawyer. But Leo, Joe's elder brother, ekes out a living running a small illegal gaming concern that is in danger of being swallowed up by one or other of the large crime organisations; and when Leo dies from a heart attack on being abducted by thugs, Joe is moved to take a stand against the corruption around him.

Revenge sagas—typically involving a hero stung into action by the killing of a family member—proved popular fare for 50s America, perhaps because they provided a diversion from the treachery encouraged by HUAC (Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, Anthony Mann's *The Man from Laramie*); but if *Force of Evil* may have some resemblance to this cycle, it is finally set apart from it by avoidance of cathartic identification with a violent hero. The film's true climax is not Joe's showdown with hoodlums but his awakening to social responsibility at the discovery in the last sequence of his brother's corpse dumped in a grimy waterway. If censorship here necessitated Joe resolving to tell the police all he knows, this is not allowed to diminish the power of the film's close. Since Polonsky has shown the police as hardly capable of clemency, it would seem that Joe may be completely washed up by this action. Thus the film looks forward to the insistence on the broken man as

hero of *The Big Knife*, Odets' anti-Hollywood play of the following year, and to the reckless humanism of *A Season of Fear*, Polonsky's anti-McCarthyist novel ('We're getting so that nothing else counts except survival and I say to hell with survival').

The American CP could hardly be considered to constitute a totalitarian threat, as HUAC asserted: its failings (a reluctance to condemn Stalinism, the branding as heretics of those making alliances with liberals) met with criticism from party members like Polonsky and drove others to leave an already dwindling party. In some part HUAC seems to have been an attempt to bring into disrepute the New Deal of the 1930s—a time when America was sustained not so much by free enterprise as by reforming federal intervention. In any event, most of those blacklisted—whether CP members or otherwise—were no more than liberals and humanists in the New Deal mould. For all the trumpeting about freedom of the individual, the HUAC period was—as suggested by Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* and Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*—a time of isolated individuals striving to uphold their principles in the face of the mob.

Some of those of a left-wing background who became friendly witnesses even contributed to the anti-Communist paranoia by claiming that they were simply acting to oppose left-wing totalitarianism. Such a claim fails to stand

up. Polonsky exposed its crucial flaw when he asked of Budd Schulberg, Kazan's scriptwriter on *On the Waterfront* and *A Face in the Crowd*: 'Why did he become an informer when they forced him to? Why didn't he become one before they forced him to?' (quoted in *Naming Names*, Victor Navasky).

More persistently than Schulberg, Kazan has styled himself the champion of individual liberty in his co-operation with HUAC. However, his conduct may have had more to do with the fact that of those threatened by the blacklist, he had the most to lose in terms of career. On a deeper level he may have been responding to the pull of the Greek American identity he would explore in later works like *America, America* and the novels *The Arrangement* (which he also filmed) and *The Anatolian*: here, in flight from the experience of poverty, the ethnic group is driven to assimilate into American society by the promise of eventual wealth and success, yet seeks to obscure the extent of its conformism by clinging to notions of a patriarchal individualism redolent of past traditions.

Certainly Kazan's strategy seems, rather than simply devious, bound up with a need to preserve his own illusions. Unlike the post-blacklist Polonsky, he never perceived how notions of individualism could actually mask the erosion of individual liberty. From the start Kazan seems himself to have been prey to something akin to the quasi-mystical faith of his hero of *America, America* in being 'washed clean' in America; and if in *Viva Zapata* and *On the Waterfront* the affirmations of a familiar American commitment to individualism would have appealed to an America needing to hide from its mob mentality, they have a heartfelt and awestruck quality that makes it hard to dismiss them as simply stage-managed.

In his 50s films particularly, Kazan often recapitulates the individualistic side to American populist attitudes that during the New Deal had worked to underplay the achievements of federal intervention. Unlike his historical counterpart, who was forced out of office by political pressure, Kazan's Zapata leaves government in the style of a 30s Capra hero in protest at the apparent corruptibility of politics; and in its support for revolution in Mexico in terms of the creation of a peasantry of land-owners Zapata recalls the romance of man and land agrarianism of King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* and the novels of its own scriptwriter John Steinbeck *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* (filmed respectively by John Ford and Lewis Milestone).

In its anti-union bias, *Waterfront* also shows something of *Our Daily Bread*'s providential trust in the power of individual endeavour—as in Terry Malloy's lone showdown with union thugs responsible for the murder of his brother,

John Garfield in *Force of Evil*.





Polonsky's *Romance of a Horse Thief*; Kazan's *America, America*.

which proves a triumph of physical resilience on Malloy's part and is followed by the emphatic staging of his leading of the longshoremen to work. Although, like Bauer in *Force of Evil*, Malloy is both mob lackey and police informer, Kazan is unable to acknowledge fully the extent to which Malloy's identity is based upon a shifting identification with power units.

The wilder forms of New Deal populism may have made all the easier the emergence of the likes of Senator Joe McCarthy—Huey Long with his fascist exhortations to farm workers; the CP encouraging a 'just folks' anti-intellectualism that appropriated figures as disparate as Lincoln and Stalin as homespun leaders. For a time some believed that such destructive attitudes could be contained: in *The Sea Wolf*, Michael Curtiz's film of the Jack London novel, human solidarity defeats the primitivistic world of the novel's overreacher antihero, with its conflation of Marx, Darwin and Nietzsche. But then with the onset of HUAC the anti-social was by implication officially

condoned—as in the fate of the anti-semitic *Crossfire*, the careers of the film's director Edward Dmytryk and producer Adrian Scott damaged by allegations of CP connections.

As HUAC consolidated its hold, Robert Rossen made *All the King's Men* from the Robert Penn Warren novel based on the rise of Huey Long. If Rossen had recently left the CP, it was evidently as much in disillusionment with the American people as with the party. In contrast to *The Sea Wolf*, which Rossen scripted, *King's Men* offers no counter to the dark mood of violence and instinct that unfolds as its smalltown politician attains demagogic pre-eminence. With the collapse of New Deal ideals, populist attitudes were continually to fuel an aggressive individualism—as is shown in the work of Ford and Vidor in the distance of *The Searchers* and *The Fountainhead* from *Grapes of Wrath* and *Our Daily Bread*.

Even before he began making films, Kazan was by his own account susceptible to the violent, aggressive side of American populism. 'We used to say in

the Communist Party that in American society you can either become a gangster or a revolutionary: both are bred of the same anger and the same resentment' (Kazan on Kazan, Michel Ciment). As resident 'proletarian thunderbolt' at the Group Theatre, Kazan had opportunity in Odets' plays to give full expression to such anger and resentment, having significant parts as both gangster (*Paradise Lost*) and revolutionary (*Waiting for Lefty*).

Given the jealous and abrasive syndicalism implicit in Kazan's politics, it was perhaps inevitable that some of his earlier films should aim to affront left-wing pietism: in *Viva Zapata* those who foster revolution are seen to play through dogmatic theorising and naive idealism a major part in destroying it; and *On the Waterfront* rejects simplistic notions of worker solidarity, drawing upon contemporary reality to depict a longshoremen's union that has become an enclave for gangsterism. Yet the overall impression is of the anger and resentment of Kazan's CP days having been shorn of their revolutionary hue to become ends in themselves—all the more so since in Kazan's promotion of a tough guy individualism Odetsian themes of success tragedy are redrafted to exemplify a process of natural selection: if in his Method interchange of vulnerability and violence Marlon Brando may recall John Garfield, it is the violence that wins out in Zapata and Malloy, emotional ties forgotten in the cause of masculine self-affirmation.

Kazan's films generally contain much of the power imagery familiar to American cinema, notably the use of cars to connote dynamic aggression. His brutish view of society is reinforced by a crude Freudianism whereby sex is depicted as an explosive force. This accounts for Kazan being drawn to the largely hermetic and indulgently fraught worlds of Tennessee Williams and William Inge (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Baby Doll*, *Splendor in the Grass*). Such Freudianism is particularly crass in the way it works to legitimise a fascination with aggression—as in *Streetcar* in the rape by belligerently proletarian and Huey Long-admiring Stanley Kowalski (Brando) of fading Southern belle Blanche Dubois, Kazan articulating with distasteful effectiveness Williams' concept of sexual dynamics.

Moral ambiguity may have been part of the experience of the HUAC period, but often in his work Kazan seems to be not so much reflecting this experience as wallowing in it—and doing so to an extent that makes his work stand out even though similar charges could be levelled against much early postwar American cinema, particularly that of the *film noir* variety. Significantly, Kazan's would-be allegory of the HUAC period, *A Face in the Crowd*, offers little incisiveness, the director trapped in an

ambivalent fascination with his amoral media demagogue hero. Kazan has always been more comfortable with narratives openly enabling legitimisation of an amoral hero. Whereas in *Force of Evil* fraternal conflict is elided by social awareness, the mark of Cain is generally a stigma to be assumed in Kazan's world: rivalry between brothers and ambivalent male friendships recur, as do ultimately tragic relationships between parent and child.

Such a view of human relationships went some way to supporting the HUAC status quo with its tacit approval of treachery in personal relationships, the apogee of which was perhaps the official veneration afforded Whittaker Chambers for his destruction of Alger Hiss. For someone so avowedly committed to the individual response, Kazan has little faith in the possibility of an effective individual morality: *East of Eden* exposes both the avowals of public-spiritedness by Cal's father and of pacifism by his brother as ultimately symptoms of a self-seeking priggishness. For Kazan socialism is deficient since its idealistic nature precludes it accommodating the less attractive but necessary side to human nature: in *Zapata* President Madero stands condemned together with his socialist beliefs because he is too good-natured to be a man of action like Zapata, who has the resolution even to superintend the killing of a wayward brother; and in *America, America* the young Greek Stavros comes to value himself as the beneficiary of a process of natural selection when in Constantinople he narrowly survives the authorities' massacre of a waterfront workers' meeting.

Kazan's work frequently evokes the

idea of benevolence (usually with Christian associations) for the purpose of disparaging it, the gift that becomes a trophy being a recurrent motif of the director. When in *America, America* the frail, consumptive Hohannes kills himself so that his entry visa for America may be taken by Stavros, he first relinquishes a pair of shoes Stavros gave him as if these ought now to go back to Stavros by virtue of the latter's survival. In *Waterfront* a jacket passes from one martyred longshoreman to another, ironically to end in the possession of Terry Malloy implicated in the death of its first owner; and in *Zapata* a horse Zapata gives to a boy revolutionary becomes similarly drawn into a sequence of death, finally appearing wild and riderless like the assertion of a biological integrity of which the violence of Zapata's assassination is but a symptom.

Kazan's statements (notably in *Kazan on Kazan*) suggest that the recurrence of father-son relationships or their surrogates in his films (often portrayed in terms of a success-failure dichotomy) reveals the impact on him of the relationship with his small-time businessman father, a casualty of the Depression. A need to cauterise guilt at having succeeded while his father failed seems to bear some responsibility for the director's penchant for self-justification. Certainly it would account for his perennial obsession with notions of natural selection and the justness of an unfortunate fate. Kazan has also spoken of feeling that his father preferred his younger brother to him; and this would suggest in particular a certain wish-fulfilment to the sibling rivalry of *East of Eden*, Cal seeking a

reconciliation with his father after emotionally shattering his brother.

Analogous situations occur in other Kazan films. In *Waterfront* Terry Malloy's search for self-affirmation necessitates his break with union hoods who in reprisal murder his brother, hitherto a successful one of their number. In *America, America* Stavros' admission to America is guaranteed by the death of Hohannes—the culmination of a series of ambivalent male relationships behind which that of Stavros to his father recedes. Inveterately clinging to an idealised view of America, Stavros seems to be trying to reconstitute some equivalent of his father's authority which he feels himself to have challenged by abandoning Europe; and the understanding of such psychology made the film of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* so apt an assignment for Kazan, the glamour of Hollywood coming to provide Robert De Niro's tycoon with a refuge from similar fears of rejection.

With Stavros finding only menial employment and his father dying before he can be brought to America, *America, America* ends with an irony and confusion that contrasts with its earlier heroic assumptions. Elsewhere in his later films Kazan was not to examine conformist psychology with so much honesty. Stavros being an uncle to Eddie Evangelos in *The Arrangement* may suggest a link between Eddie's ethnic background and the conformism that prevents him from breaking out of a career in advertising; yet, even more so in the film than in the novel, Kazan buries psychological exploration in a satire on advertising so that Eddie's dilemma is often portrayed as a simple thwarting of individual dynamism by modern society.

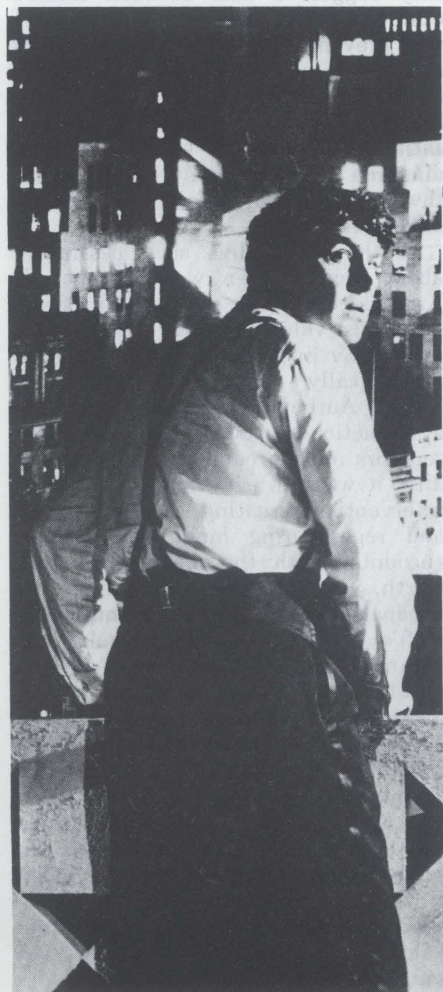
In the later films such pessimism about society often works to bolster Kazan's continuing distaste for liberal and leftist values. Such is the case with *Wild River* in 1960. Here the New Deal is cynically evoked, the Tennessee Valley Authority depicted largely as a cosmetic on power games between senators and bureaucrats—when in reality it was an achievement of federal intervention, creating cheaper energy and regenerating land. Through his encounter with the matriarchal Ella Garth, who refuses to move from the floodpath of a TVA scheme, Montgomery Clift's TVA functionary develops a regard for physical prowess and a nostalgia for a past America of the territorial imperative apparently more vital than the bureaucratic society to which he belongs. In its frontier romanticism *Wild River* now seems very much part of its time, the continuing success into the 1960s of the Western with its generally epic view of society an index of America's resistance to the truths about social division that directors like Polonsky, Rossen and Dmytryk had sought to introduce into cinema.

Mob lackey and police informer: Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*.



Despite with *America, America* and *The Arrangement* scripting, producing and directing, Kazan was increasingly drawn to novel writing. Whereas even his more half-baked films are in part redeemed by the direction (particularly the sensitive performances elicited from actresses, like Lee Remick in *Wild River*), the novels are generally contrived and lumbering meditations on the authenticity of the primitive. Kazan shows a disturbing respect for males who act from crude tribal impulses: the old Greek American in *Acts of Love* who in a crazed defence of ethnic honour satisfies sexually and then murders his son's all-American nymphomaniac fiancée; and the Mexican-American army sergeant in *The Assassins* who kills a hippy for consorting with his daughter. Both men become heroes to their communities; and the latter case is the occasion for one of Kazan's most bitter attacks on liberal values, the young man seeking justice in the murder of the hippy driven to murder the liberal lawyer assisting him in an acknowledgment of the primitive 'truth' of the sergeant's violence. For much of the time in his novels Kazan seems to be mechanically reiterating his preoccupations rather than exploring or developing them. *The Understudy* recalls in its defence of the informer *Waterfront*

A Face in the Crowd: Andy Griffith.



and the Vietnam era movie *The Visitors*, and in *The Anatolian* Stavros projects on his homeland of Anatolia—now Turkey—similar dreams to those he held for America in *America, America*.

Blacklisting meant that Polonsky was only ever able to find sporadic creative independence in the American cinema. Even scripts for which he was able to take credit after the blacklist (*Madigan*, *Avalanche Express*) ended as crudely directed action thrillers, their moral complexity inadequately inflected. Yet, over twenty years after *Force of Evil*, Polonsky did manage to direct *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, one of the best of the self-critical Westerns of the early 1970s; and soon afterwards came *Romance of a Horse Thief* which, like Kazan's *America, America*, has sadly only in France achieved reasonable distribution and found a discerning critical response. If slim, Polonsky's directorial output remains indispensable, particularly for the ease with which it skirts the kind of confusion of values that led Kazan to spiritual emptiness.

Willie Boy is about a Paiute Indian who becomes the quarry for a posse when he flees with his girlfriend after accidentally killing her possessive father. The film harks back to such memorable HUAC explorations of scapegoating as Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* and Alan Dwan's *Silver Lode*, as well as films such as Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* and Rossen's *They Came to Cordura* that—in contrast to much of Kazan's work—responded to HUAC by viewing America's avowals of individualism in terms of a shabby vanity. Polonsky had already dealt with the latter theme in his anti-HUAC novel *A Season of Fear*, an examination of the arrogant and complacent psychology of a government employee whose career advances due to the impact of the blacklist on his department; but *Willie Boy*'s elaboration is particularly ambitious: while the majority of the posse's members clothe their actions in a heroic frontier romanticism, they are clearly especially galvanised by the need to put on a show during the visit West of President Taft.

Not only here does Polonsky reject the kind of idealisation of America's past Kazan expressed in his later work: the Paiutes are also incisively portrayed. In becoming a hero to his people, the fugitive Willie confirms them in their insularity and refusal to join the modern world. Polonsky is aware of the problems inherent in identification with a minority. Reacting against feeling an outsider for having worked among whites, Willie is increasingly absorbed by the fanatical, terrorist identification with his people that his predicament invites. Aptly the opposition in the movie's early scenes

between Willie and John Vernon's poolhall thug and subsequent posse member echoes Robert Wise's *Odds Against Tomorrow*, which a blacklisted Polonsky clandestinely helped script, where Harry Belafonte's black power acolyte and Robert Ryan's down-at-heel racist work as mirror images of an essentially impotent social disaffection.

In his portrayal of Willie, Polonsky eschews the masochistic identification with the underdog so common in the cinema of Nicholas Ray; and *Willie Boy* also refuses to accord a direct moral authority to those in socially responsible jobs, contrasting with the majority of postwar liberal movies—notably early Kazan movies like *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Panic in the Streets* where society is protected by respectively a journalist and a health inspector. Elizabeth Bowman, the reservation worker, has become as embittered as Willie in her struggle to be an independent woman in what is unfairly a man's world; and prey to a scornful proto-feminism that seems more a reflection of her wealthy upbringing than a valid response to her situation, she instinctively resents Willie and tends to see him simply as a chauvinistic male who has abducted a girl. Such ambivalence towards men also propels Elizabeth to Robert Redford's Marshal Coop, a man of liberal persuasion, but for whom a relationship with her is made something of a test of his manhood by her displays of hostility to him.

If Polonsky may here be recalling a tendency among certain CP colleagues to lose sight of themselves in their political posturing, he does not see hypocrisies in the behaviour of those of a left/liberal persuasion as proof—like Kazan—of the impracticability of what they claim to stand for, or—like Rossen in *Lilith*—of a basic tragic fallibility to people; for him it is that people claiming any persuasion can be divided against themselves in a divided society. Polonsky has always tended to criticise society rather than the individual. This is why if in *Willie Boy* the relationship of Coop and Elizabeth evokes the wanderer-home antinomy familiar to the Western, Polonsky makes no claims about man-woman relationships being inherently antagonistic (as Kazan does in his novels) and portrays this particular relationship as, if not uncommon, capable of being changed.

For all his circumspection, Polonsky finally articulates in *Willie Boy* as strong a trust in the possibility of a straightforward humanity as in *Force of Evil*. The vehicle for this is Willie's friend, Lola. Education has given her independent-mindedness and an ability to assimilate into society on her own terms; and she goes with Willie of her own choice, not to conform to tribal dictates. It is thanks to her presence that Willie's violence is more threatened than real. We never know whether

Lola dies from her own hand or from Willie's; but it seems that physically incapable of continuing the flight, she may have chosen death in an attempt to stem the anger and bitterness confirming Willie on his trajectory to terrorism. Like Stavros with Hohannes in *America, America*, Willie could have accepted Lola's death as the price of his survival; but he disconsolately retraces the route they have travelled together, and when Coop kills him, he finds that Willie has faced him with no bullets in his gun. If tragic, Willie's death does provide a way for the humanity of Lola to permeate the relationship of Coop and Elizabeth. When Elizabeth witnesses a dejected Coop wiping Willie's blood from his hands, she seems at once to acknowledge a vulnerability to Coop and to appreciate the sad and lonely nature of Willie's dying.

The tone of *Romance of a Horse Thief* is more relaxed than in Polonsky's previous films. Central to the film is the mellowing of the relationship between the poor Jew Kradnik and the middle-class student revolutionary Naomi—initially, he in embittered isolation like previous Polonsky heroes, she priggish but confused rather like Elizabeth Bowman. Although the film is set in Russian-occupied Poland in the early part of the century, its world is a sunlit one shot through with the type of gentle nature imagery that has often underscored humanism in the American cinema, as in the famous close of Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*—with the reaching out for a butterfly—or in pantheistic New Deal movies like *Our Daily Bread* and *Grapes of Wrath*.

Polonsky's aim is not so much nostalgia for past ideals as the idealisation of the world he portrays. His earlier films deal with the violation of personality, and in *Romance* he fashions a world where it is possible to live without hate, where people find self-respect through respecting one another. In neat antithesis to Kazan's trophy symbolism, Polonsky places a priority on the notion of gift, recalling the eponymous tokens of Mitchell Leisen's *Golden Earrings*—his first script credit—and the yellow scarf given to Lola by Willie which functions as a symbol of his continuing humanity: thus, given a horse by a countess for sexual pleasures, Kradnik does not keep it as a trophy but trades it to acquire a present for Naomi and a dowry for his sister.

Whereas Kazan portrays the family as all too susceptible to the competitive pressures of society, Polonsky is concerned here with reconciliation between generations—a theme evident even in the inception of the film, which was developed by David Opatoshu (who plays Kradnik's father) from short stories by his father. Unlike Kazan in *East of Eden*, *Splendor in the Grass* and *America, America*, Polonsky does not



Trajectory to terrorism: Robert Blake in *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*.

criticise his hero's father for failure to maintain an authority that would seem proper to his role: Kradnik comes to appreciate his father even as a man of compromise, the old man placing the protection of his family above the preservation of patriarchal self-esteem. Thus (unlike the typical Kazan hero) freed from exalted notions of male conduct, Kradnik is not too deeply emotionally scarred by being reduced through deprivation to live by stealing horses.

A contempt for Europe has at times been part of the propaganda of American identity. General Patton's famous speech to troops before the invasion of Sicily imputed a heroic legacy to his Italian and German American soldiers by comparing their European counterparts as the product of stock who failed to emigrate to apparent freedom; and the same equation is at least implicit in *America, America* in the contrast between self-help Stavros and his beaten-down father. In its recognition of the need to respect origins properly, Polonsky's work counters such sentiments. In *A Season of Fear*, Professor Strom, a refugee from Nazi Germany, places value on the notion of exile, having found immigration a depersonalising process and as such one that has left him vulnerable to the intimidation of HUAC. In *Romance* Kradnik is signally spared the compromise of Strom in what for Polonsky is a statement of the liberating potential of socialism.

Kradnik is without the illusions of Kazan's Stavros: initially heading for America to escape conscription in Russia's war with Japan, he lampoons the idea of a heroic destiny awaiting him in the American West. In any event, he

returns to rescue Naomi from prison, outwitting Cossack troops with the help of—among others—his father. When Kradnik heads again for the border, it is with a varied crew of friends and relatives—Polonsky's way of saying that America should be for everybody. Their renewed sense of personal worth suggests that these refugees will be able to assimilate into American society on their own terms; unlike Kazan's Greek Americans, there should not need to display ethnicity as a means of hiding from both guilt about origins and a desperate need to be accepted.

Ultimately Kazan and Polonsky provide complementary outlooks of tragedy and potentiality. Of course Kazan may never really have been able to distance himself from his portrayal of heroic posturing and conformity to recognise in this the tragedy of how most people live their lives; yet, as a romantic masquerading as a pragmatist, he seems all the more relevant to the Reagan era, his work telling us much about the evasions of American culture. Although Polonsky would probably be sneered at by many of today's Marxists with their ambitions to scientific rigour, there is value in his call to America to adopt a humanist rather than epic interpretation of its history. Suspicious of America's romanticisation of its frontier past, he sees a more vital past lying among the poor of Europe who must be accorded their own integrity in the flow of history for America to find genuine self-respect. HUAC may have scored its victories, but the spirit of John Garfield still waits to find peace.

—The— Unknown Ince

If one wants to be English Public School about it, it was really Thomas who was Ince Minor, whereas John was Ince Major and Ralph was Ince Minimus, but in the world of movies the arrangement was somewhat different. Jean Mitry (*Histoire du Cinéma*) knows that there was more than one Ince brother; so does Ephraim Katz, if you look up his *Film Encyclopaedia*; and so too, naturally, does Anthony Slide, author of the first book on the Vitagraph company. But most people interested in film history have still to recognise the existence, let alone the importance, of Ralph Ince, the first master of mainstream continuity cinema, or 'classical cinema', or whatever one wants to call the standard form of cinema which everyone accepts as normal.

Actually, when one looks closely at the workings of the highly organised Vitagraph studio before 1914, the largest in America, most of the usual claims made for the famous Thomas Ince, as the man who created the American system of studio production, begin to seem feeble. They boil down to

no more than that he insisted on his directors sticking to the shooting script and that he was the first studio head with such a talent for self-publicity that he succeeded in taking all the credit for his studio's products. Not a lot to boast about.

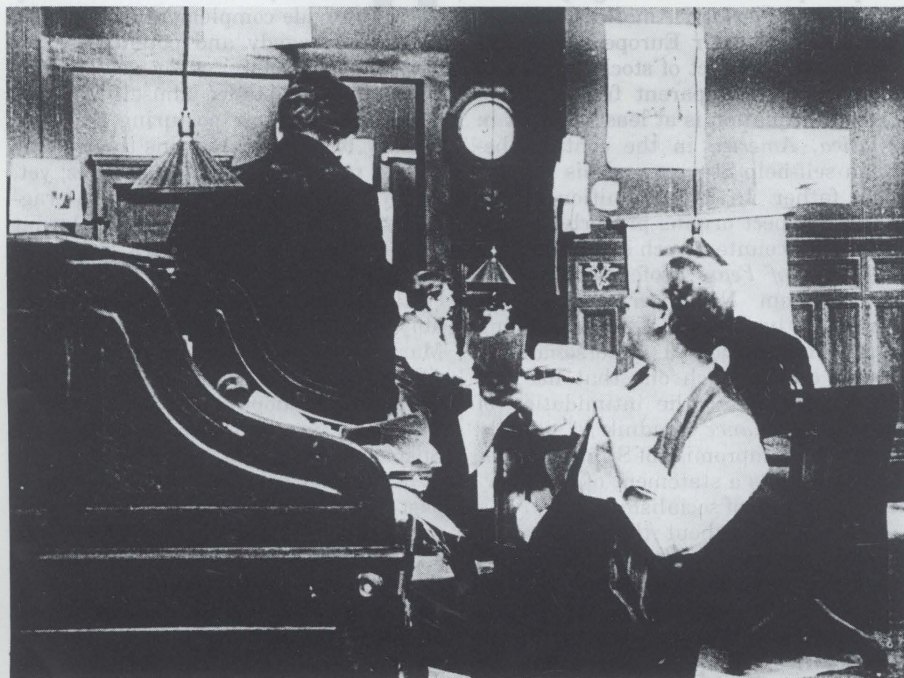
The three Ince brothers were the sons of a pair of American travelling actors of no particular importance, and as was usual in that milieu at the turn of the century, the children too acted from their early years. Ralph was the youngest, born in 1887, and after several unremarkable years in the theatre, he became a commercial artist. He joined Vitagraph in 1907, before his elder brothers had anything to do with the cinema, and apparently started at the bottom, acting as a prop boy among other jobs. From this position he progressed to appearing in small parts in Vitagraph movies, so small in fact that, even if you know what he looked like, it is hard to spot him. For instance, in *C.Q.D.*; or, *Saved by Wireless* (1909), he is one of two men called in to hear the news of the distress signal from the

maritime accident, but he wears a hat pulled down over his eyes, is on screen very briefly and keeps moving so fast that even his mother would have difficulty recognising him. And he is there somewhere in the background, under costumes or whiskers, in about a hundred Vitagraph films before he pulled himself out of the ruck, possibly by the classic move of writing a story designed to feature himself in a leading part.

Certainly, in the surviving films from Vitagraph, the first one that features Ralph Ince in a leading part without whiskers, etc, is *The Derelict Reporter* (1911), where his role presents what seems his favourite self-image as a demoralised drunkard at the end of his tether, who pulls himself together when the testing moment comes and saves the day. There are two variations on this role. In one, our anti-hero survives and gets the girl, as in *The Derelict Reporter*; in the other he dies nobly, as in *His Last Fight* (1913), which Ralph Ince also directed. In this film especially, the image of Humphrey Bogart springs to mind, particularly since there was some physical resemblance between the two men. However, Bogart was not the only actor who made a career out of this type of role, for before him Hans Albers became a star playing similar parts in German films, from *F.P.I. antwortet nicht* (1932) onwards, and no doubt the idea originated in the mists of nineteenth-century drama. In the Ralph Ince version, a part of the characterisation involves playing the scene where he is really at the emotional bottom with his back to the camera, which is the kind of thing that Emil Jannings was to become famous for in the 1920s. But this approach was less outstanding at Vitagraph, given the special form of staging, with actors playing with their backs to the camera, that became standard there from 1910 onwards.

After *The Derelict Reporter*, Ralph Ince began the series of Abraham Lincoln impersonations for which he then gained most public renown, starting with *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* in 1911. (Vitagraph had already picturised George Washington,

Ralph Ince (back to camera) in *The Derelict Reporter* (1911).



so they had to do Lincoln too.) Then, in the middle of 1912, he was given a chance to direct, and here it is just possible that the fact that Thomas Ince was beginning to make a name for himself at minor studios as a director and producer helped to turn the trick for Ralph, even though there was no direct connection between their careers.

The earliest extant picture which it is likely that Ralph Ince directed is *A Double Danger*. The anonymous *Moving Picture World* reviewer commented (September, 1912): 'One sees, before the picture is finished, why it was called *Double Danger*; but the two sides of the situation are not woven together in a very dramatic way. A little crippled girl is being operated on at home. Her father, who is in charge of an express car and is carrying a very large invoice of money, is fighting a convict at the same time. This half of the picture is the only truly dramatic side. All that is dramatic on the other side is expressed by the mother; but the complex emotions in the mother that, if means had been found to make them very plain, would have united the two parts into one whole, were not clear enough. It would be very difficult to make them clear. Also the matter of fact way in which the father responded to the call to duty and left the wife and child hampered the real meaning of the picture. Perhaps, if more time had been given to this scene, it would have been a stronger production. But there is good material in it, and it will give good entertainment.'

This review is quite just in its estimate of the film, and quite penetrating about its weaknesses. *A Double Danger* is clearly an ambitious attempt to realise a Griffith-type arrangement of three strands of parallel action, but the construction is rather contrived, since, as the review notes, it was not very natural in 1912 America that the father would *have* to go to work while his child was undergoing an operation (on the living-room table!) by a 'famous European surgeon' (Ralph Ince in a chin beard). The third strand of the parallel action is created, again in a rather forced way, by having the mother confined to the kitchen during the operation, listening to its progress through the door and registering anguish the while. The cross-cutting between these strands of action is less rapid than it would have been in a comparable Griffith film of the same date, but by Vitagraph standards it is quite striking.

The review does not, however, mention some of the more technical features of the film: a clever transition from the interior of a real guard's van, shot with available light on location, to closer shots of its interior done on a good studio set; and cuts to closer shots with angle change at two other points in the film. The second of these, in the express car (i.e. guard's van), is not



A Double Danger (1912), with Ralph Ince as the surgeon.

really necessary, since the usual Vitagraph staging with actors as close as nine feet to the camera makes everything clearly visible, but seems to have been done purely for its own sake. The way in which the guard nails up the recaptured convict in the box in which he was hiding, and then addresses it to San Quentin, where it duly arrives, suggests the same sense of humour displayed in later Ralph Ince films.

Ralph Ince was successful enough to be allowed to direct one of the three-reel features which Vitagraph was starting to produce fairly regularly in 1912. This was *The Mills of the Gods*, released on 4 November, the film which really drew attention to him as a director. At the beginning of 1913, among many other

films now lost, Ince made another larger-scale feature which *has* survived, the two-reel *Strength of Men*, based on a James Oliver Curwood story of the rugged north. The *Moving Picture World* review (5 April 1913) is worth quoting to show how far the best American film criticism had progressed by this date, with acute attention to the technical side, as well as dealing accurately with more general features of the film. On stylistic and other grounds I would guess that it was written by George Blaisdell, the most capable and perceptive staff writer of the journal.

'A two-reel feature subject that will probably stir enthusiasm. It is a picture of Alaska and deals with two men and a girl. The tale is cleverly introduced and

Low-angle shot from *Strength of Men* (1913).

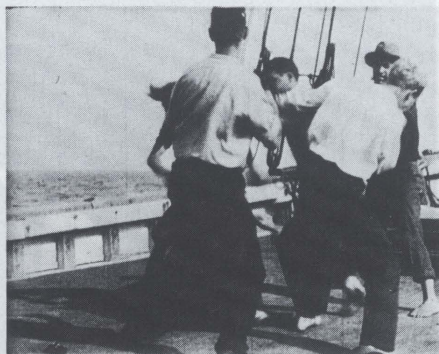


leads up to a race between the two men for a rich gold claim. This is a long gruelling contest in which the two, each in their canoes and each with an Indian helper, follow a rough line down a torrent half blocked by huge boulders, and through a wild pine forest. To complicate matters the forest gets on fire, and this is used to bring out the human quality of the men, for it turns out that neither can save himself without the other's help. The picture is full of elemental vigour, and then has this human ending. There is a marked freshness in it, and in the production of this the photography and the angle at which the scenes are taken play a very important part. All the camera work deserves high praise. Those blizzard scenes are unusual, and the water and the fire views are good. The acting holds all through, and Miss Story (the girl) shows especially clear insight in one scene—that in which the first man comes back and finds her in her father's cabin with the stranger she doesn't really love. It's a big picture, a true feature.'

The key word here is 'vigour', for Ince's films tend to have more of it than other Vitagraph productions. It is also evident in the scene showing Ince directing in *How Cissy Made Good* (1914), a Vitagraph comedy which features a tour of the studio. In *Strength of Men* the sense of scale is achieved purely by camera placement in suitable locations. In the core of the film, the race between the two miners to the disputed claim, shots of the canoes shooting the rapids are topped by high-angle shots taken from a distant position up on the mountain-side, with giant burning pine trees falling between the canoes and the camera. Then on to the big fight, with the bare-chested men slugging it out amid the smoke and flames of the burning timber.

The reviewer speaks of the camera angles (for the first time in any film review I have read), and besides the high-angle shots I have mentioned, earlier in the film the protagonists are shot from low angles close in at medium shot, and framed so that they reach to the same height as the mountains and tall trees behind them. Big Mountains, Big Trees, Big Men. The earlier Griffith films which introduced distant views of large-scale scenery inserted these only as picturesque punctuation and decoration. In *Strength of Men* the giant landscape is much more part of the action, in the way that was to become the ideal in later film-making.

The film opens, at any rate in the surviving print now available, with a striking night scene, in which a man is struggling through a blizzard up to a log cabin. This scene is actually shot at night, and the man is picked out in the foreground against the blackness by the light from an arc floodlight just out of shot, with the lighted window of the cabin showing in the distance. As he



Ralph Ince and Anita Stewart
in *His Last Fight* (1913).

comes up to the cabin and its window, there is a cut to a closer shot, and he is picked out again by a little well-judged fill-light. There just isn't anything else comparable, in all these respects, in any film made up to the beginning of 1913.

In between making multi-reel features, Ralph Ince continued to knock out one-reelers, and even split-reel comedies, such as *Two Is Company*, *Three Is a Crowd*, also made early in 1913. This is a lively piece of work without any great distinction, but it does demonstrate in the last scene that Ince was still working to perfect the

technique of cutting to different angles within a scene, at a date when this was still very rare. The film is concerned with trickery among the male office staff about who should take the office typist to the theatre, and the object of their desire is played by Anita Stewart, a rising Vitagraph star. She was the sister of Lucille Lee Stewart, also a Vitagraph actress and the wife of Ralph Ince. When Ince began directing in mid-1912, he introduced Anita into the company and directed all her films up to 1916. As well as great beauty, she had a personality that came across strongly in films, and a considerable range, playing all the way from society women to country girls and being particularly adept at comedy.

Ince quickly absorbed the latest technical developments in film construction, including reverse-angle cutting. By the end of 1913, in fact, he had pushed reverse-angle cutting further than anyone else. *His Last Fight*, released in November 1913, contains 75 shots within a total length of 731 feet, which is indicative of how he and other American directors were following the speed-up in cutting rate led by D.W. Griffith. Of those 74 cuts, no fewer than 25 were from one angle on a scene to the reverse angle. But this latter feature was something one definitely did not find in Griffith's films, except in the very rare scene showing theatre and audience, when in any case Griffith took the shots from a greater distance.

In *His Last Fight*, the interchanges of looks and words are covered by reverse-angle shots taken at the nine-foot line, and closer, and Ince also uses the technique of cutting in closest at the emotional peak of the scene. All this takes place in the long climactic scene on the deck of a schooner, which of course, as an exterior, makes the reverse-angle cutting easier to use. No one else, however, did anything like it at this date in any film I have been able to find, and that includes the films made at his brother Thomas Ince's company.

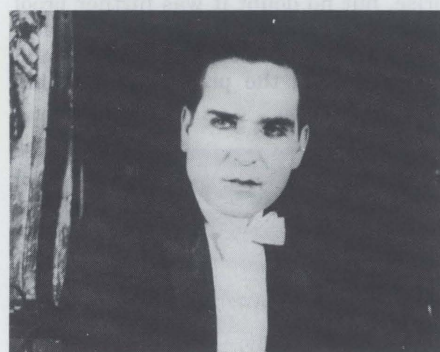
At the beginning of 1914, Ralph Ince made the first of the five-reel features released by Vitagraph, *A Million Bid*, which was used for the opening season of a large Broadway theatre that the company had bought and renamed the Vitagraph Theatre. The more or less accurate details of this event can be read in Albert Smith's memoirs *Two Reels and a Crank* (pp 253-58), but the film itself, which was very well received at the time, is now lost. In fact the only Ralph Ince film available from about a dozen he made in 1914 is the one-reel *Midst Woodland Shadows*, released on 12 October. This shows no technical advance on the earlier films, for although smoothly cut together with suitable use of point of view shots, it does not otherwise use cutting within scenes. (This phenomenon, in which a director who has mastered new

technical means does not always exploit them in all his films, is general among the film-makers of the first couple of decades of the cinema, however puzzling it may now appear.) But when we move on to the surviving films from 1915, it is apparent that Ralph Ince must have been doing further work on his technique throughout 1914.

The Right Girl?, released on 20 January 1915, has all the basic features of mainstream continuity cinema in place and working properly. It has many reverse-angle cuts within scenes, and indeed the main visual joke at the end depends on reverse-angle cutting. *The Right Girl?* is an example of domestic comedy, which at this date was just reaching a degree of sophistication that we would nowadays accept as normal, and it begins as it intends to go on, with an introductory medium close-up of the backs of the heads of a young couple with their arms around each other's shoulders. Then there is a cut to the opposite angle to reveal 'Mr and Mrs Newly-Wed' at the breakfast table, as the title puts it, and also to reveal that they are played by Anita Stewart and Earle Williams, the permanent centre of the Ralph Ince team. (Starting a scene on a close shot and cutting back to reveal the whole setting, rather than doing it the other way round, was a very new idea in 1915, and although Ralph Ince did not necessarily invent it, he was certainly already doing it well.)

The reluctant farewell and parting on the front steps as the husband leaves for the office is filmed with a series of reverse-angle cuts with perfect position and action matching that seems a conscious demonstration of mastery of the technique, for they are not strictly necessary to the staging. Here as elsewhere in this film, small and smooth framing tilts and pans are used by the cameraman to keep the actors well framed as they move about; a technique that had been developed for some years at Vitagraph, but which was still not common and indeed did not become standard till the late 1920s. The great emphasis on close shooting (which is what makes framing pans desirable) was yet another exceptional feature, and helps to make the film look very modern. As does the fact that nearly all the intertitles are dialogue titles, and that they are all cut in at the moment the character starts to speak, and then back to him or her finishing the line. The first encounter of Mrs Newly-Wed with the bachelor looking for the 'right girl' occurs in a street outside a surgical-goods store, and this looks like another piece of sly humour, at any rate to older people who remember which piece of equipment of interest to bachelors-about-town could only be bought in a surgical-goods shop, once upon a time.

Some White Hope? released a month later, continues the Ince in-joke tradi-



Soft focus in
His Phantom Sweetheart (1915).

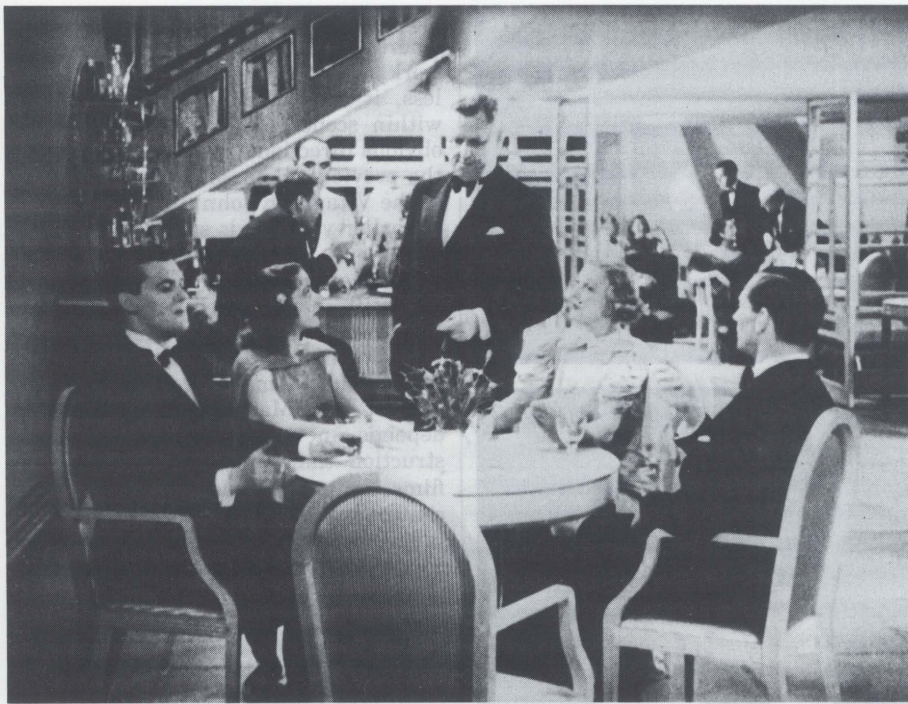
tion when the principal character, starting to undress for bed, looks towards the camera as though suddenly recognising its presence. He then walks forward and pulls down a blind in front of it, as though the camera were peering through an invisible window into the room. The blind is only lifted when he has changed into his nightshirt, and then the comedy proceeds as it had started, in the standard American way, with no further acknowledgment of the camera's existence. The film's story revolves round the comic potential of hypnotism, a popular idea of this

period, both at Vitagraph and elsewhere, and it is a rather coarser piece of work than *The Right Girl?*. Nevertheless, it does display as much cutting within scenes, though there are more obvious directional mismatches than in the previous films, and when compared to the Vitagraph John Bunny 'comedies' of earlier years, it is still a masterpiece of humour.

From several weeks later (14 April) we still have Ince's *His Phantom Sweetheart*, another one-reel vehicle for Earle Williams and Anita Stewart, who was by now a major star, regarded on a level with Mary Pickford. This film depends on a trick of narrative construction that only works properly in films, and which indeed had done fairly continuous service since the beginning of the century, but *His Phantom Sweetheart* is the best realisation of it up to 1915. It also shows that the command of all the basic features of continuity cinema evident in *The Right Girl?* was no accident: it makes extensive use, for instance, of dialogue titles and close shooting; it further demonstrates how reverse-angle cutting can enhance the impact of an exchange of glances; and how, too, it can speed the action, by making it possible to leave out, undetectably, the boring and unnecessary depiction of a character's movement across a room or a street.

The whole is topped off by a near-perfect display of low-key lighting used for mood purposes. Indeed, the lighting is some of the best produced up to this date, even though several scenes were handicapped by being shot in a real theatre auditorium and foyer, with arc floodlights brought in specially. And it also contains what seems to be the earliest example of 'soft focus' photography, for the beautiful mysterious woman of the title first appears behind rows of people in the foreground, with the focus set so that they are sharp and she is slightly out of focus—a point which is proved by the identical set-up on the reverse angle showing the hero behind a similar row of people, but having sharp focus covering everything in the picture. When there is a cut to a closer shot of the woman alone, the focus on her stays slightly soft.

When I first came across *His Phantom Sweetheart*, I was troubled by the suspicion that it had been wrongly dated, and had been made several years later than 1915. Among films made at other studios in 1915 that might be compared with Ralph Ince's work, there is nothing I have seen which is so advanced. In particular, the best films made at the Thomas Ince studio in 1915, which are those directed by Reginald Barker, such as *The Coward* and *The Italian*, largely lack the features I have been describing, and where they are present in minimal form the handling is much clumsier. In fact, Barker's 1914 films show that he had not yet discovered the reverse-angle idea.



Ralph Ince (centre) in *Perfect Crime* (1937).

It should hardly be necessary to say that D.W. Griffith was still working in an entirely frontal way at this date, with any transitions to closer shots being done down the lens axis, rather than with angle change. Most of the shots in Griffith's films also had an iris-in and iris-out at their beginning and end, which introduced extra discontinuity into his movies, not to mention the mismatches in the actors' positions when he did do a direct cut to a closer shot. He also made minimal use of dialogue titles. In fact, Griffith never properly caught up with the new style of continuity cinema (or 'classical cinema', if you insist), but over the next few years most of the American

directors who stayed in the business went down the path which Ralph Ince had cut.

His Phantom Sweetheart was immediately followed by the five-reel feature. *The Juggernaut*, Ince's biggest success, though only a single reel containing one of its massive train smashes is now available. After this, Ince was occupied for the rest of the year with directing the 15 episodes of *The Goddess*, Vitagraph's first true serial. From the plot summary, this sounds a bizarre enterprise, but no doubt it was further proof that our hero was the only director employed by the company who could drive through the production of a big

film and produce a vigorous result. The management of Vitagraph certainly appreciated Ralph Ince's work, for when they sacked most of their contract directors and actors at the end of 1915, they kept Ince, and even built him a special new studio on Long Island exclusively for his productions. But something went wrong, for Ince left Vitagraph at the end of 1916, and then set up as an independent producer with his eldest brother, John, who had taken up directing a couple of years before.

Ralph Ince remained an independent producer-director for the rest of the silent period, but clearly nothing he did thereafter was as striking as his achievements at Vitagraph. The only one of these later films that I have so far been able to see is *The Woman Eternal*, made in 1918 as a vehicle for Elaine Hammerstein (who?). Its only notable feature, in the context of other films of this date, is a gunfight at night between people trapped inside a house and their enemies in the surrounding forest. As before, Ralph had no connection with the activities of his brother Thomas, until the latter's sudden death in 1924 made it necessary for Ralph to take charge of his studio to see through the productions already under way. (For what it is worth, I record the information, told me by one of his colleagues from the 1930s, that Ralph was one of those who believed that Thomas Ince was murdered by William Randolph Hearst, and that Hearst bought off all the potential witnesses.) Throughout the 1920s, Ralph also continued to play leading parts in some of his own productions.

The transition to sound created many difficulties for silent film people and particularly for the independents. Ince was reduced to playing character parts for a couple of years, notably in *Little Caesar* (1931). He managed to return to directing at RKO in 1932, and then went to England to work for Warner Brothers at their Teddington studio as actor and director in the 'quota' films they made there. Only two of his films from this period survive, and they are solidly made, very good-looking productions, appreciably better than the usual idea of British 'quota quickies'. *Crime Unlimited* (1935) has some vividly staged action scenes, not to mention the entrancing debut of Lilli Palmer; and in *Perfect Crime* (1937), Ralph Ince introduces himself in a leading role with his back to the camera, in the good old style. His career would seem to have been set to continue fairly successfully, but he was unfortunately killed when his motorcar hit a traffic island outside the Albert Hall later in 1937. He was drunk, but his wife, they say, was driving. ■

An earlier version of this article, in Italian, appeared in 'Vitagraph Co of America: il cinema prima di Hollywood', ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai (Pordenone, 1987).

Crime Unlimited (1935).



JOHN UPDIKE

PAUL THEROUX

GRANTA

GRAHAM GREENE

SALMAN RUSHDIE

WILLIAM BOYD

DORIS LESSING

GERMAINE GREER

MARTHA GELLHORN

IAN MCEWAN

MARTIN AMIS

GÜNTER GRASS

JAMES FENTON

BRUCE CHATWIN

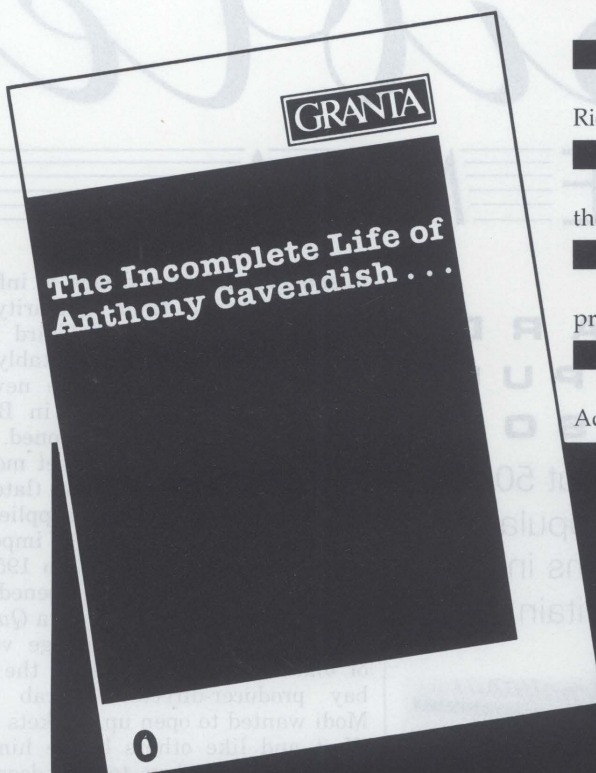
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The Invisible

C I N E M A

What is the image of popular Indian cinema in Britain? Until a few years ago, it was of a rundown cinema in Birmingham, Bradford or Leicester catering to Asian families at weekends with song-and-dance melodramas, its wares advertised by huge gaudy posters. Nowadays, it is the corner video shop with its rows of Indian titles servicing an apparently insatiable market.

The story, however, goes right back to the early days of the talkies when the most likely—almost the only—place to see an Indian face was at an English public school or university. Bombay Talkies ventured into Britain in 1933 with *Karma*, released in both Hindi and English. The English version was well received and ran for ten months at the Pavilion, Marble Arch, before going on to a limited regional release. But that was almost the end of the story as well. Distributors, then as now, tended to fight shy of foreign films; and Indian films had already begun to acquire that unenviable reputation which in some quarters still undeservedly sticks: too long, too silly, poorly made.

Matters did not pick up until two years after Indian independence. India's first High Commissioner in Britain, Dr Krishna Menon, was determined to promote the best of Indian culture in Europe through the India League. In February 1949, Menon hired London's Tivoli cinema for the British premiere of *Kalpana*, a sort of invitation-to-the-dance film made by Ravi Shankar's elder brother Uday. Young expatriate Indians, students and nurses, came in force and thus was born the India Film Society, which opened that November with *Kismet*, director Gyan Mukherjee, an immense hit on the subcontinent and the movie which established Ashok Kumar as a top star.

In those early days, the society hoped—vainly as it turned out—to screen the best of world cinema, including Third World films which would not otherwise be seen in Britain. Krishna Menon spoke at the time of the need to find money to subtitle films to open up the world to the masses. 'These are not propaganda or government information films. They are the entertainment films seen by the ordinary people of India. They are being shown to dispel

EDWARD HOTSPUR JOHNSON

writes about 50
years of popular
Indian films in
Great Britain



Nargis at Heathrow, 1955.

misunderstanding and lack of information.' But despite their popularity with Indians, others from the Third World and some Europeans (notably the Spanish), Indian films were never to attract the mass audience in Britain which Krishna Menon envisioned.

The India Film Society met monthly at the Baker Street Cinema (later the Classic); prints were often supplied free by producers and the costs of importing them met by well-wishers. In 1953 the rival Asian Film Society opened with *The Sword and the Flame* (aka *Queen of Jhansi*), the English-language version of *Jhansi-Ki-Rani*, made by the Bombay producer-director Sohrab Modi. Modi wanted to open up markets in the West and like others before him saw London as the key to the door. But again, this was not to be. The film was well received by the mainly foreign audience, the subject matter being the Indian Mutiny from the Indian point of view, but the British public stayed away. The location of the screening, however, was of interest: the old Scala cinema on Charlotte Street, where later Channel 4 was to be based and play a not insignificant part in this story.

In 1952, India's most expensive film to date had been dubbed in London. *Aan* (*Royal Prestige*, aka *Savage Princess*) was a Technicolor costume drama made by Bombay's leading showman Mehboob Khan with the international market in mind. Mehboob, however, could find no distributor for this glossy and well-made entertainment: black and brown people in heroic roles were an unacceptable novelty. A deal was finally struck with Alexander Korda, at that time owner of the Rialto, Piccadilly Circus, whereby Mehboob hired the cinema for a minimum of four weeks with an option, renewable weekly, for a further eight. In the event, *Aan* played for eleven weeks to good houses, but Mehboob was still unable to interest an Anglo-American distributor. The story was not the same in Spain and Portugal, where *Aan*—the first Indian film to be seen in those countries—was acclaimed by the critics. Its success was repeated in North Africa, where more than 35 years later it is still getting screenings.

In 1955, Charlie Carrasco, an Anglo-

Indian, mounted the Asian Film Society's first Festival of Indian Cinema. New subtitled prints were made and the festival was properly advertised. The society's president, S. N. Gourisaria, a Bengali jute merchant, persuaded Ingrid Bergman and Peter Ustinov to grace the gala opening. The range of films was impressive, and among the hits of the week were *Awaara* (*The Vagabond*), *Do Bigha Zamin* (*Two Acres of Land*) and *Pari-neeta*. *Munna*, directed by K. A. Abbas, was however the first Indian film to land a British distribution deal, through Charles Cooper's Contemporary Films. It was a 'songless' picture, a fact which may have helped secure the contract.

Momentum gathered with the second festival in 1957. Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* and Raj Kapoor's *Shree 420* (*Mr 420*) drew large audiences, the former having won the top prize at the Cannes festival and being promoted with gusto by Marie Seton. Raj Kapoor, Nargis and Guru Dutt came from Bombay, the latter accompanied by his wife, the playback singer Geeta Roy. Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (*Eternal Thirst*) was the opening film but received mixed reviews from the few critics who attended. The *Guardian* considered it mish-mash mediocre, but the *Daily Film Renter* and especially *Reynolds News* gave it rave reviews. It was subsequently released in Britain, although not in the expected way.

By 1957, small communities of Indians and Pakistanis had become established in London, Birmingham and other industrial centres. Men predominated, living in hostels or shared houses; they filled a labour shortage, taking jobs as bus conductors, shift-workers and dirty-jobs workers. The curry houses of Bradford and the Asian corner-shops of Birmingham had yet to appear: there was little to remind them of home. Two enterprising Asians spotted an opportunity: Bishu Sen, a Bengali ex-seaman, formed Taj Mahal Films of Wardour Street; and D. D. Meghani, a textile merchant, operated under the name Overseas Trading Co Ltd from Little Newport Street. Both these new film distributors specialised in Indian films for the Sunday screenings held at such venues as Digbeth Hall, Birmingham. Indian workers were prepared to travel long distances at weekends to see films.

The success of the second festival of Indian Cinema encouraged BBC TV to make a half-hour documentary (possibly the first western television programme on the second largest film industry in the world). At the same time, the World Service broadcast a 'special' on the subject of Indian cinema with Guru Dutt and Geeta Roy.

Two years later, Eric Douglas acquired the Western Talkies cinema, a fleapit on Manchester Road, Bradford. It was a case of dreams triumphing over reality: cinemas everywhere were closing as television eroded their audiences,



K. A. Abbas, I. Pochee and High Commissioner Mrs Pandit at the 1955 festival.

the owner of Western Talkies had decided to call it quits, and Douglas, then manager of the cinema, raised the money to buy it. At the same time, the Indian dancer Vijayanthimala was taking Paris by storm. During a break in the shooting of *Sangam*, Raj Kapoor's epic triangular love story which was being shot partly in Europe, the classically trained Vijayanthi introduced Parisian audiences to the delights of Bharata Natyam and Mohini Attam, as well as more popular folk styles. Paris dance enthusiasts have been in love with India ever since. Vijayanthi repeated her triumph in London. Backstage, a couple of nervous Indians from Bradford persuaded her to come to Yorkshire the following Sunday to be guest of honour at a screening of her film *Aasha* (*Hope*).

Eric Douglas knew he had a winner when coachloads of Asians disgorged in the rain from Manchester and even further afield. The arrival of a top Indian star at a backstreet Bradford cinema across the road from a giant textile mill must rank as one of the more curious moments of British film

history. The evening was a triumph even though Vijayanthimala was not allowed to perform: the local authority sternly refused to lift its ban on dancing on the sabbath.

Western Talkies became Europe's first full-time Indian cinema. In 1961, D. D. Meghani, who by now employed a Bradford lass as his secretary, persuaded Mr Douglas to take a subtitled print of *Mughal E Azam* (*The Great Mogul*), which was then an immense hit in Bombay. The sublime performances of Dilip Kumar and Madhubala drew capacity audiences: day after day, matinees and evenings, they came from every corner of the country. Special weekend screenings accommodated the Birmingham coach trade. Indeed, Douglas showed the film continuously for six months until the print wore out. He made so much money that he had a bungalow built near Peel Park in Bradford and named it 'Mughal E Azam'.

Though Rank had helped to sponsor the Asian Film Society, it was Columbia Pictures that made the first significant deal with Bombay. In 1958, Mehboob's *Mother India* became the

Festival visitors (I. S. Johar centre) in Trafalgar Square.



first (and last) Indian film to be nominated for an Academy Award for the Best Foreign Film. Spurred on by this, Columbia's London office negotiated American and European distribution rights and opened talks with Mehboob (which came to nothing) on a co-production about the Taj Mahal. *Mother India* has been released in most countries of the world: in Britain, in addition to its perennial screenings to Asian audiences, Columbia twice gave it a limited national release. In 1958-9, a two-hour version, promoted by an excellent trailer, did well in some cities; in 1961, however, a 95-minute version aimed at a family audience fared indifferently (the Bombay original ran 170 minutes). The reviews for this popular classic were dreadful. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* referred to it as a 'rag-bag pantomime', while the shorter version was dismissed by the *Kinematograph Weekly* as 'uneven . . . direction lacking discipline . . . will hardly curry favour with average audiences.'

By the 1960s, with Indian films being distributed with success in the Soviet Union, Spain (where *Mother India* ran for three years), the Arab world, West Africa, South America and elsewhere, and with a growing circuit of Asian cinemas in Britain, such dismissive criticism in Britain and in the United States mattered less. Bombay distributors saw tax advantages in dealing with overseas business overseas and several set up offices in London. By 1980, there were fourteen. From London, films would be subtitled in Cairo or Brussels and released in Casablanca, Tunis or Paris (to an African and Arab clientele), or passed on to such places as Trinidad and Guyana.

Dhirubhai Savani set up De Luxe Films on Charing Cross Road and soon became the largest distributor in the UK Indian community with a library of hundreds of titles and customers in three continents. 'In those days the telephone would never stop ringing night or day,' he recalls. He also helped to launch Salim Akhtar into the printing business since Bombay did not provide enough publicity material. De Luxe Printers still operates in Camden Town.

During the 1960s Indian social life came more and more to focus on the local cinema. There were now many more Indian families living in Britain, and for some wives the weekend visit to the cinema was their only social event. Poetry recitals and song contests, weddings and parties would be held there. Books, sweetmeats and fan magazines were sold in the foyer. In the interval of an extravagant Bombay double bill, tea Indian-style and samosas increased the feeling of home. It was common practice to programme a new release with an old favourite. Given the audience, few films were subtitled, and only the biggest hits, such as *Mother India* and *Pakeezah* (*Pure Heart*), continued to receive this treatment.

Special guest appearances by the stars ensured sell-out business. Nargis,

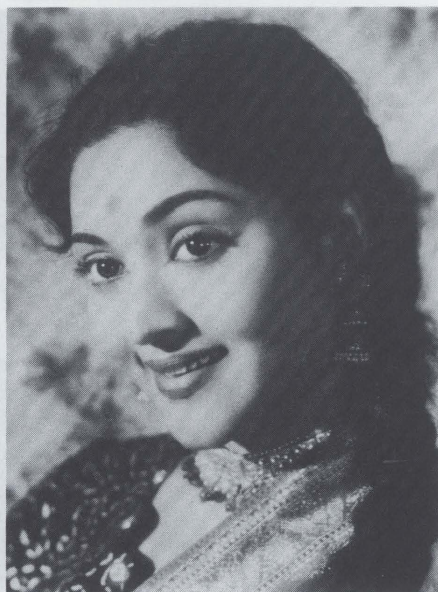


I. S. Johar, Nutan and Mehboob on the steps of the Scala.

Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar were mobbed. From the stars' point of view it justified to the taxman in India what was in effect a holiday shopping trip to Europe as a business promotion. In 1966, the adulation of Indian stars led to a Granada tv special on Indian cinema with clips from the film *Leader* and interviews with its star Dilip Kumar during his triumphal tour of England.

In the 1970s, while ordinary cinemas in Britain closed, their Indian counterparts boomed. *Pakeezah*, Kamal Amroh's magnum opus, received a gala premiere at Southall, as yet more cinemas were bought or hired for the Indian audience. At the height of the boom there were some 120 cinemas screening Indian films full or part time. With one exception, the cinemas were independently—and sometimes unscrupulously—managed. The fans came despite leaking roofs, worn-out projection equipment, no heating, tattered prints. Even films which had flopped in India sometimes made money in Britain. By 1976, the UK was

Vijayanthimala, visitor to Bradford.



Bombay's largest source of overseas income. British television made so little effort to cater for Asians that they voted with their feet.

Anglo-Overseas was the only distribution company to run a chain of cinemas. The Liberty cinemas were well managed and maintained; and at one time there were 18 of them from Balham to Bradford. Indeed, the last single cinema to be purpose-built in Britain was Liberty's Natraj in Leicester in 1980; but by then, regrettably, it was too late. A British invention of the BBC in the 60s was refined into a marketable product by the Japanese, who began, in 1977, the mass manufacture of VHS video recorders. Sindhi businessmen in Hong Kong, Dubai and Gibraltar immediately grasped their potential and began importation to Britain. Thus began the Asian video boom and the birth of video piracy.

Having endured appalling conditions in some cinemas, and sometimes unable to see the films of their choice, Asian families took to video with pleasure and relief. By 1980, Asians in the UK were the world's first mass video audience: more than half the country's Asian families owned or rented a VCR. There was status in owning a machine, and it was in the long run cheaper than taking the family to the cinema. Unscrupulous cinema-owners went bankrupt and were replaced by, if anything, still more unscrupulous video pirates: by 1980, ninety per cent of the more than 1,000 available Indian titles were estimated to have been bootlegged. The customers didn't care: for £1 they were watching a good-quality film in the comfort of their homes.

One by one, the film distributors folded. The pioneering India Film Society, which since 1966 had held weekly Sunday screenings at the Haymarket theatre, shut down in 1981. By 1984 the last cinema had closed: some say it was the Naz on Brick Lane, others the Apsara in Leicester. Though Asian social life has suffered, the cinemas will never be open again. A small irony is that while Indian popular cinema was in its death throes, it was at last beginning to gain its rightful recognition in art film circles. During the Festival of India in 1982, the ICA and the Commonwealth Institute screened seasons of Indian films, television documentaries were transmitted and Channel 4 put out its first season of Bombay classics, 'All India Talkies'. The Scala cinema had once again become home to Indian films.

For thirty years a classic such as *Mother India* had played in backstreet venues in Britain. It had been screened at the Cinémathèque Française, in Berlin and in Hollywood, but never at the National Film Theatre in London, despite the availability of subtitled prints. However, in May 1987, a wrong was at last put right with the NFT's first acknowledgment of Bombay's popular films: a retrospective of the work of Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt.

FLAHERTY

BEFORE

BEFORE

GRIERSON



Edward Curtis (at camera) filming *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914) in British Columbia.

THE DOCUMENTARY FILM IN 1914 ■ BRIAN WINSTON

Compurgation was an early medieval legal process, an alternative to trial by battle or ordeal. In compurgation, the accused brought into the court other persons who would swear that he or she simply could not have done the deed. Richard Barsam's *The Vision of Robert Flaherty** is a work of compurgation. The accused is Robert Flaherty. The implied charge to which the book seems to respond is that he had feet of clay. The defence is that Kevin Brownlow, Jean Renoir, André Bazin, Andrew Sarris and assorted others, led by Professor Barsam, compurgate that charge by denial. He couldn't have feet of clay. We swear.

This is a curious book, a blast from the past. In it Flaherty remains a unique genius, a patriarch of cinematic practice, 'a born teller of tales'. It is not that Barsam is ignorant of the growing contrary opinion. He knows there are those who doubt—and is very courteous to them (myself included). But his strategy is not to deal with the issues raised by these critics; instead, he makes hollow gestures towards their arguments while all the time continuing to waltz around Flaherty's charisma. There is nothing here of recent scholarship, neither in style nor substance. (On page 9, for instance, Barsam cites Lévi-Strauss, but from a quote by Gore Vidal. And this from a university press noted for its film list.)

The Vision of Robert Flaherty deals, at no great length, with the production history of the main Flaherty films in chronological order, gives synopses of same and offers brief remarks about their reception. A skein of biographical material is added. There is little new in any of this. The direct ethical issues raised by Flaherty's exploitation of his subjects and his reconstructional methods remain of tangential interest to Barsam. The implications of Flaherty's conflicting position as observer and, at the same time, artist would seem to be beyond his ken. 'Realism' does not make it to the index. 'Narrative' does but the entry begins: 'Narrative: Flaherty's gift as a teller of tales...' This unsophisticated approach leads Barsam to miss, as I will show, Flaherty's essential contribution to the development of the documentary.

In this book Flaherty remains 'one of the five great innovators' which Grierson made him. According to Barsam, Flaherty was 'a rather singular artist... among the first film-makers to observe and record actual life, creating a non-fiction genre all his own.' Despite the caveats in this encomium ('among the first'), Barsam rates the films as 'unique'. This opinion can be, and is, best supported by sins of omission—most importantly, in the account Barsam gives of Flaherty's precursors.

The history of the pre-Flaherty non-fiction film Barsam offers is just one paragraph long. He cites the Lumières, and mentions the coining of the term 'travelogue' by Burton Holmes in 1908.

He goes on: 'Among these early travel film-makers were Cherry Kearton, who filmed Theodore Roosevelt's 1909 African expedition; Herbert Ponting, whose film about Robert Falcon Scott's 1910-1913 tragic expedition was released in 1913 as *The Undying Story of Captain Scott*...; Emery and Ellsworth Kolb, who made films in the Grand Canyon in 1911; Martin Johnson, whose *Jack London in the South Seas* (1912) Flaherty admired; and Lowell Thomas who in 1914 and again in 1915 shot footage in Alaska.'

This establishes a tradition for Flaherty to work in. It allows Barsam to claim, correctly in terms of this canon, that Flaherty's approach significantly differed from that of these predecessors. The compurgator Paul Rotha is allowed to sum up these differences—Flaherty was a trained explorer, he knew his subject intimately, and he understood the need for dramatic structure.

One can quibble about the first two of these attributes. 'Trained' implies a formal course of study and Flaherty never had that. He dropped out of school and college and learned all he knew of prospecting (which is what exploring was all about for the young Flaherty) at his father's knee. Film-making, in so far as he ever fully understood it and as Rotha elsewhere acknowledges, he picked up as he went along. Intimate knowledge of the subject does not distinguish him from the others in Barsam's list and anyway speaks more to the appearance of Flaherty's understanding than to his substantive grasp of anthropological

* *The Vision of Robert Flaherty*, by Richard Barsam. Indiana University Press, \$27.50 (paper, \$10.50).

truth. However, about Rotha's last point there can be no argument. Flaherty did indeed understand the need for dramatic structure in ways different from the others. But what if one were to go beyond the list?

The absence of Edward Curtis from *The Vision of Robert Flaherty* is not only extraordinary but emblematic of the irrelevance of Barsam's book. Edward Sheriff Curtis worked as a photographer of native Americans in the Pacific Northwest for nearly 35 years. His 1,500 sepia-coloured prints are central to the collective photographic image we have of *The North American Indian* (the title of his 20-volume masterwork). For President Theodore Roosevelt, Curtis was, like Flaherty, 'both an artist and a trained observer. . . He has lived on intimate terms with many different tribes.'

Curtis, like Flaherty in *Nanook*, *Moana* and *Man of Aran*, was given to reconstructional practices. He took the tribal life he found and pushed it back a generation or two in the interest of the picturesque. Native Americans could not readily be found outlined against the sky astride their ponies in full ceremonial dress, so Curtis helped them along—just as Flaherty was to help Allakariallak, who played the character 'Nanook', recreate the life of a previous generation of Inuit.

Curtis was also not loath to take the lead in such work, providing tribes with appropriate dress, accoutrements and ceremonies when these had been lost to them through acculturation. And Flaherty, in the same way, was happy to revive lost ceremonies and activities like tattooing and shark-hunting if the need arose. But this common propensity to romanticise present realities in favour of past supposed glories is not the only, nor indeed the main thing Flaherty and Curtis share. For Curtis, like Flaherty, also understood the need for drama—and Curtis understood it first.

In 1914, Curtis made a movie, *In The Land of the Head Hunters*. Virtually lost shortly after its release until the

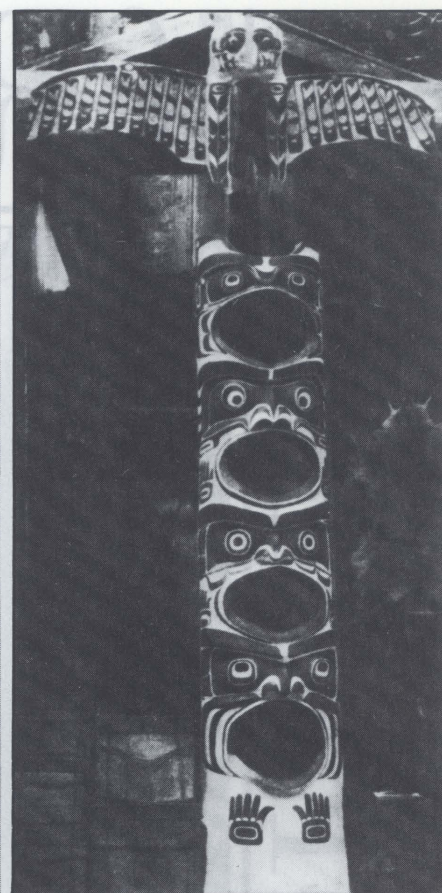
late 40s, the film has now been restored with a Kwakiutl soundtrack and a new title *In The Land of the War Canoes*. (Since it also has one new shot, this current version raises a number of issues which cannot be here addressed as to the efficacy of the restoration. It seems to me that adding shots is an obviously absurd thing to do. Adding an anthropologically accurate soundtrack, while of interest to anthropologists no doubt, is equally unfortunate from the cinematic point of view.)*

The restoration reveals *In the Land of the Head Hunters* to be a crude melodrama, even in 1914 terms. The storyline can barely be followed and the acting, which includes the same native Americans appearing as different characters and the same character being represented by different tribespeople, does not help.

Only three things make the film of interest in the present context. First, Curtis uses Kwakiutl people. Secondly, he films enough of their ceremonial for *In the Land of the Head Hunters* to remain (whether or not a generation or more out of date) a valuable ethnographic record of that culture. Finally, and most importantly, he understands the needs of his own culture well enough to realise that a series of observations of tribal life will not suffice to make a movie popular. Hence the melodramatic framework he provides for his ethnographic material.

In all these matters he is a direct precursor of Flaherty. Flaherty's contribution, then, is not that he was trained (he wasn't); nor that he was uniquely intimate with his subjects (he wasn't); nor that he alone understood the need for drama (Curtis did too). What Flaherty understood, though, was the need for the drama to arise from the life being observed, not be imposed from without.

* A description of the restoration, production background, full synopsis and a number of stills can be found in *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes*, by Bill Holm and George Irving Quimby, University of Washington Press, 1980.



Head Hunters: set detail.

So whereas Curtis has headhunting and magic and unwilling brides, Flaherty has the supposedly everyday life of a single Inuit family. This difference was to prove crucial to the development of the documentary. This was the insight that allowed Flaherty to create a form which thrives, as Bill Nichols put it, 'in the crease between life as lived and life as narrativised' ('Questions of Magnitude' in *Documentary and the Mass Media*, edited by John Corner, Arnold, 1986). Curtis' people were narrativised but they were not in any sense 'living'—Flaherty's were both narrativised and living.

Even odder than the omission of Curtis is that Barsam makes nothing of this crucial breakthrough. Barsam's synopsis of *Nanook* divides the film, quite arbitrarily, into six sequences. For instance, the fishing scene which precedes the walrus-hunt is itemised as sequence three and the hunt itself as sequence four. But sequence five is deemed to include the journey, the fox in the trap, the making of the igloo, play, and night; and the 'final sequence' is equally extended.

I am not concerned with the fact that the making of the igloo, surely the most excerpted sequence in the entire canon of 'great films', is subsumed into something else. What bothers me is that Barsam's taxonomic confusion exactly masks Flaherty's main innovation.

What follows the intertitle 'Winter Comes' in *Nanook of the North* (Barsam's fifth sequence) is exactly an extended story constructed artificially by Flaherty from various discrete 'sequences'. The result is, for the first

On location for *In the Land of the Head Hunters*.



time, 'life as narrativised'. For all these elements—the journey, the fox, the igloo, play, morning, the seal-hunt, the dog-fight, the storm, the rush for a new igloo, night—not only depend for their meaning upon their position in the unfolding story; they also build to a climax, indeed a race to safety of positively melodramatic proportions.

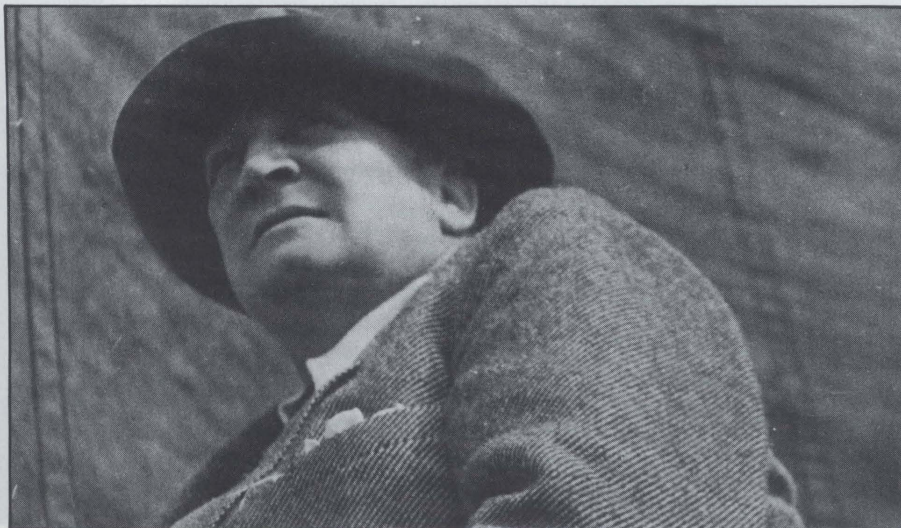
Flaherty's genius, and I do not use the word lightly, lay in building this story out of bits which by no means necessarily hung together in this particular way. The climax of the film has the dogs fighting over the seal meat which delays the family's search for shelter as a storm blows up. The suspense involved here is conveyed by the intertitles. It is the intertitles which tell us why the dog-fight matters. It is the intertitles which tell us how this imperils Nanook and his party.

Along the storyline told in the intertitles Flaherty hangs out shots and sequences of shots like washing. Most notoriously, he uses the retiring and arising sequence he has filmed in the false (i.e. one-sided) igloo in two different places. Half the sequence—getting up—starts the final 'day' of the film. The other half—going to bed—is omitted from the previous day but comes right at the end of the second day (and the film) and is, according to the intertitles, supposedly set in a quite different 'abandoned' igloo.

Understanding not just how to manipulate his everyday material, but also what dramatic necessity imposed on that manipulation, is the essence of Flaherty's contribution. It is this, not the blarney surrounding the films and the man, which remains of enduring interest.

But did Flaherty come to this insight unaided? There is every reason to suspect not. Jay Ruby, the most important of the scholars to be virtually ignored (or remain unabsorbed) by Barsam, has examined Mrs Flaherty's diaries. On Monday, 11 April 1915, Flaherty and Curtis met in New York. On Tuesday, they screened *In the Land of the Head Hunters* and Flaherty's first footage of the Baffin Island Inuit, shot, as was the Curtis film, the previous year.

Robert Flaherty.



At lunch, Curtis apparently gave Flaherty 'the benefit of his own personal experience in the moving picture world' (Holm and Quimby, p 30).

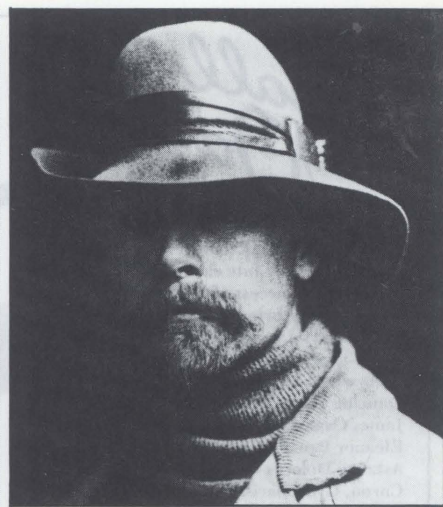
The echoes between *Head Hunters* and *Nanook* are strong—the use of native peoples in directed sequences; the recreation of their past culture; the imposition of a story (at least in the second half of *Nanook*). There is even the death of a great sea creature, a whale, in *In the Land of the Head Hunters*. Without a serious consideration of *Head Hunters*, Flaherty's achievement in *Nanook* simply cannot be understood.

But Curtis' claim to be written into the history of documentary goes beyond his influence on Flaherty. Despite Eric Barnouw's brave attempt to establish the Polish pioneer, Matuszewski, as the person who first used documentary in the context of the cinema (in 1898), Grierson has not been dislodged from the received history as the originator of the term.

In fact, Grierson's use of the phrase 'has documentary value' in connection with his review of Flaherty's second film *Moana* has a somewhat grudging air. The 'documentary value' is a result of *Moana* 'being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family. . . But that [writes Grierson] is secondary to its value as a soft breath from a sunlit island washed, etc, etc.' In short, this reference constitutes a not untypically slim basis for 'firstism'.

When Curtis was preparing for his own venture into motion pictures a decade or more before this famous review, he issued a prospectus for the Continental Film Company: 'Associated with several of Seattle's leading business men, Mr Edward S. Curtis has formed a small company for the making of commercial motion pictures of the Indian and the Indian life' (Holm and Quimby, pp 113-14).

The prospectus goes on to stress Curtis' extensive experience with the tribal peoples, and proposes a series of films on all the tribes of North and South America. 'Exceptionally substantial dividends' are promised not



Edward Sheriff Curtis.

least because the proposed films will, because of their historical and ethnological importance, have increasing value, unlike the entertainment pictures which 'go to the junk pile' after six months. Then comes this:

'The questions might be raised as to whether the *documentary material* would not lack the thrilling interest of the fake picture. It is the opinion of Mr Curtis that the real life of the Indian contains the parallel emotions to furnish all necessary plots. . . All pictures made should be classed among the educational, and should be preserved as part of the *documentary material* of the country. . . In making such pictures, the greatest care must be exercised that the thought conveyed be true to the subject, the ceremony be correctly rendered, and above all, that the costumes be correct. It must be admitted that the making of such a series of pictures would be the most difficult thing attempted in motion photography, but it can be done, and will be one of the most valuable *documentary works* which can be taken up at this time' (italics added).

'Documentary material', 'documentary works' and a definition of the documentary film stressing authenticity. By 1914, at the latest.

Poor Matuszewski seems to be ruled out of court because he was a Pole writing in French and Barnouw offered no evidence of a connection between him and Grierson. But Curtis is in a different case. He was using the term 'documentary work' in a clearly Griersonian sense by 1914. He made a dramatic ethnographic film which he clearly saw as containing 'documentary material'. And, above all, there is every reason for believing he showed Flaherty the way to make his own contribution in *Nanook*. Further, *Head Hunters* was noticed, being mentioned for instance in Vachel Lindsay's book, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915). Lindsay was one of the people Grierson sought out in Chicago in 1924.

I am not concerned about firstism. But I am concerned that we make progress by getting things right. And I want Edward Curtis to assume his rightful place in the history of the documentary film. ■

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The Last Temptation of Christ: Harvey Keitel (Judas).

Raging Messiah

The Last Temptation of Christ/Jonathan Rosenbaum

Martin Scorsese's guilt-ridden fascination with the profane, in cinema and Catholicism alike, has always complicated as well as energised his secular subjects with a sense of inner struggle. Yet now that he has confronted his faith directly, the conflict between flesh and spirit that informs his work poses a new set of problems. What's disconcerting about his adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis' novel is not only that it has removed the objective distance between himself and his work that his secular subjects provided; it has also occasioned an international protest which has mainly served to obfuscate rather than address the issues raised by the film, while attempting bans, boycotts, and even a purchase of the negative in order to destroy it. (The overall level of argument can be gauged by a placard seen in Chicago: 'God doesn't like this movie'.)

If Scorsese is easy to misunderstand, so are virtually all the leading filmmakers of doubt—Dreyer, Rossellini, Godard, Rivette, Preminger, Cassavetes—for whom a shot is often a question rather than an answer, a hypothesis rather than a fact. Yet the religious doubts of Scorsese, one should stress, are not doubts *about* religion, but, on the contrary, doubts which could only exist *within* a system of religious belief. In the case of *The Last Temptation of Christ* (UIP), this becomes the struggles of Jesus Himself (Willem Dafoe) between His own humanity and divinity, between the constant temptation of evil and the acceptance of His martyrdom. In this radical recasting of the Gospels, Jesus is so alienated from His divine calling that He is first seen as a carpen-

ter building crosses for Roman crucifixions. Only through the efforts of Judas (Harvey Keitel)—a political activist who sets Jesus on the path to rebellion, and who ultimately betrays Him to the Romans only at Jesus' insistence, in order to ensure His martyrdom—is the establishment of Christianity made possible. And it is Judas again who persuades Jesus to return to the Cross and accept His final suffering 'like a man' after He is lured down by Satan (disguised as a guardian angel) to lead an ordinary life of sex and procreation with Mary Magdalene (Barbara Hershey).

Some of Scorsese's bold departures from convention can be defended, at least in theory, as applications of principles found in Kazantzakis' novel. The use of contemporary American accents and plain (as opposed to exalted) speech can be viewed as a substitute for Kazantzakis' use of the 'demotic' language of the Greek peasantry rather than the 'puristic' language of Athenian intellectuals (as described by his English translator P. A. Bien), although the choice of English accents for the Romans (including David Bowie's tersely underplayed Pontius Pilate) and for the Satanic guardian angel (whom Scorsese, but not Kazantzakis, represents as a little girl) raises a whole slew of separate questions. Electric guitars and hints of rock percussion (along with traditional North African and Middle Eastern music) in Peter Gabriel's score mark another move towards the vernacular, albeit a more successful one than the clumsiness of Paul Schrader's dialogue.

Roughly the first three-quarters of

the film amounts to a Gnostic reinterpretation rather than a presentation of the life of Jesus, proceeding by fits and starts through diverse theological issues, and assuming a great deal of prior knowledge of the Gospels, with a fair share of grotesqueries along the way (e.g., Jesus, like a Cronenberg hero, removing his heart and holding it out for the disciples to see—a good example of the baleful Schrader influence). Only when the film arrives at the last temptation does Scorsese come into his own as a concentrated and purposeful storyteller, and the ending is very nearly powerful enough to justify the vagaries that preceded it.

Scorsese has argued that the view of Christ taken from Kazantzakis is no more than a postulate: 'I don't say the concept... is *the* truth, but it is a fascinating idea. In Kazantzakis' depiction, Jesus wrestles with the human side of His nature as he comes to terms with the God within Him. Because of His dual nature, human and divine, every moment in His life is a conflict and a victory.' The film seeks to stage this same conflict and victory in the spectator, and the figure of Jesus becomes, in effect, the theatre of that encounter. The challenge of the story, in short, isn't merely Jesus' temptation but the fact that the audience is asked to identify with it, masochistically as well as narcissistically.

It is a conflict that leaves little room for any developed sense of community, and just as little space for love as anything more than an abstraction. One might assume, for instance, that Jesus loved lepers more than Ronald Reagan loves AIDS patients, but this is not the impression with which Dafoe's Jesus leaves us. Like all the other actors, Dafoe is admirable and impressive (even if one wishes he were a little less well-groomed), but the film keeps him so tightly focused on inner struggles that the evidences of humanity around him seem to figure mainly as props. As in Scorsese's other films, the notion of the extended family which is so central to the Gospels is simply beyond the reach of the protagonist. (Indeed, one reason why *The King of Comedy* may be Scorsese's masterpiece to date is that he finds there the perfect medium for this alienation: television, a combined Narcissus pool and family surrogate for nearly all the film's major characters.)

Women may be the ultimate status symbols in Scorsese's films (including Mary Magdalene here), but passion principally exists between men, whether expressed through love or brutality; here it is basically the love that passes between Jesus and Judas. The use of females throughout to signify only motherhood and temptation (of the male) suggests that if anyone should be objecting to this film, it is women of all denominations rather than fundamentalists of both sexes. Yet the male

hysteria which has previously been the hallmark of Scorsese's style is only fitfully present—in certain moments of violence and in a couple of panicky subjective pans that convey Jesus' edgy sense of God dogging His heels as he moves along a riverbank. On the whole, Scorsese's stylistic strategies here add up to a series of negative decisions—a deliberate reduction of the range of his expressive arsenal (in terms of colour, framing, editing and camera movement), apart from certain key moments.

Part of the difficulty in assessing *The Last Temptation* within the present climate—in mid-August—is that the focus of the uproar has not been against the film itself (which most protestors have not seen), but against questionable

paraphrases of its meaning and content. The ludicrous assigning of its 'authorship' to MCA chairman Lew Wasserman, which has in turn launched an onslaught of anti-semitic invective from Rome to Los Angeles, is a comment on what capitalism, as espoused by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, has done to contemporary views of art, a confusion of authorship with ownership that has already made personal Hollywood projects such as this one virtually impossible to realise. The equally absurd claim that the film was chiefly made in order to turn a profit has been ironically undercut by the money made by both American fundamentalist groups and MCA as a direct consequence of the protests. (MCA's decision to release the film six weeks ahead of schedule has

undoubtedly helped this process along, at the same time that it has allowed the film itself to reply to the charges against it.)

The film's depiction of Jesus' wavering, which remains at the centre of the charges, is handled mundanely rather than salaciously by contemporary standards, and by implying that Christianity is a battle which must be perpetually fought, it brings the question of faith alive in a way that few religious films have attempted. Yet the terms of Scorsese's challenge come dangerously close to solipsism—a solitary struggle that never moves beyond self-scrutiny, not a communal experience to be shared. The pity and compassion of a Dreyer or a Bresson are conspicuously absent. □

Family album

Distant Voices, Still Lives

David Wilson

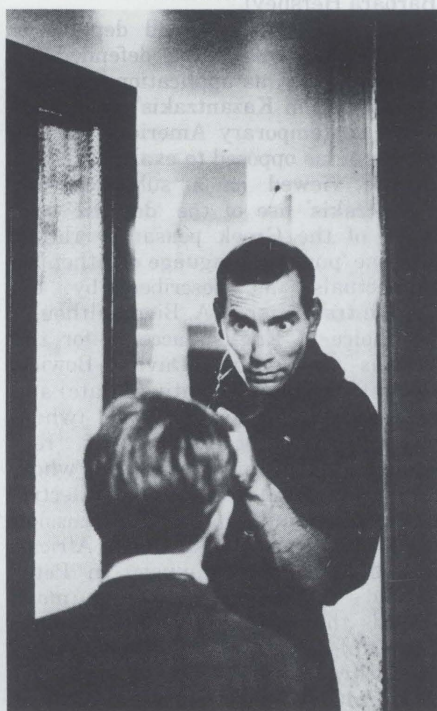
Dogger, Tyne, Heligoland. Fisher, Forties, Bight. For anyone born before the age of universal television, this liturgy of mysterious places is an indelible memory. The radio shipping forecast, rendered with the unmodulated precision of a religious creed, was somehow required listening. You did not talk over it, out of respect. It was a moment out of time. *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (BFI) begins with a radio shipping forecast, a voice out of nowhere as the camera holds and holds on a shot of a staircase. It is a breathtaking moment, paradoxically tense in its absolute stasis. And it encapsulates from the start what I take to be the central mood (it is scarcely a theme) of Terence Davies' extraordinary film: a sense of crystallised time, of memories in aspic.

They are family memories. And it will doubtless be said that, as in his trilogy of films which culminated in *Death and Transfiguration*, Davies is here again working out his relationship with his family. Clearly there is some truth in this, not least by the filmmaker's own admission and from biographical evidence. Davies was born in Liverpool in 1945, and evidently had the kind of childhood which leaves permanent scars. His new film is set in Liverpool in the 1940s and 50s, and centres on a family wounded by the malign presence of a brutish father. But this is only an autobiographical work in the sense that, say, *Sons and Lovers* is 'about' Lawrence's own family. It is a film rooted in personal memory, but transcending it. As in the doctrine of transubstantiation—and the family here is Catholic—the substance is mysteriously made something else. For one thing, the setting is deliberately denied a geographical specificity: the city of

Liverpool is recognisable only from the characters' accents. As in a family photograph, exteriors are cropped out, rendered insignificant by the centrality of the subjects. The terraced houses and grim Victorian public buildings belong in a working-class area of a large city, but the film does *not* have a Liverpool accent. It is a work of intense interiority, unmediated by the particularity of place.

As is evident from the beginning, when voices from the dark disturb that still contemplation of a staircase and the camera finally begins to describe a full circle, until it comes to rest on an open front door through which we see a hearse passing along the street. Here as throughout, the colour is desaturated—drained of any suggestion that these are the charged images of nostalgia. The next shot confirms Davies' strategy,

Distant Voices, Still Lives:
Pete Postlethwaite.



which is concerned not so much to represent the past as time remembered, either with affection or with displeasure, as to render it almost as a present experience. A family—mother, two daughters, younger son, dressed for mourning—is contemplated by the camera; the composition, the pose, the fixed gaze into the lens, suggest a photograph from a family album. Except that families do not normally preserve their grief in a photograph, so that the very stillness of the shot assumes a doubly ambivalent connotation. It looks like, but clearly is not, a still photograph: we are denied the vicarious pleasure of nostalgia.

These 'still' photographs are used as a trigger to the reliving of individual memory. A family group before the wedding of the elder daughter Eileen (Angela Walsh) recalls for her the death of her father—his absence from the photograph. For her sister Maisie (Lorraine Ashbourne) it sparks a different recollection, of her father beating her with a broom after she had asked for money for a dance. But the family portraits do not provide the characters with psychological shading; they remain as they are, outside of time. The film has no narrative development in the conventional sense. It is built out of incidents, moods, fragments of a family life. Mother (Freda Dowie, whose face even in repose conjures a lifetime of forbearance) dozes by the open fire, stirring the embers of her children's growing up. There is a snapshot of the girls and a friend camping on the sand dunes; a few seconds out of the time when Eileen and her friend worked as summer season waitresses in a North Wales hotel; an extraordinary overhead shot, held longer than its 'real' time, of the son and his brother-in-law falling through a glass roof. Snatches of dialogue, the remembered clichés of a family's private language ('I love the light nights, but they're starting to draw in now, aren't they'), enhance this sense of fragments out of time.

Distant Voices, Still Lives is actually two films joined together, the second half shot two years after the first. The seams don't show, not least because the two lighting cameramen, William Diver and Patrick Duval, achieve an extraordinarily resonant matching of image to mood. The film's key device, however, is Davies' use of the music of the time. There are long moments of communion as the family and their friends sing in the pub, and other moments when the popular songs of the period add a primary colour to the darker tonal range of the images. The songs are also used

transitionally, overlapping one fragmented memory and the next. There are too many songs perhaps, particularly in the several long scenes in the pub, though on the whole they are used aptly and precisely. But it is the precision of the images which haunts. Locked in their stillness is a potency of emotion which recalls Bresson, a director (and of course one whose films are steeped in Catholicism) whom it would be no surprise to learn that Terence Davies admires. The question now is whether this remarkable film-maker can finally close the family album. □



Au revoir les enfants: Raphaël Fejtö (Bonnet), Gaspard Manesse (Julien).

Childhood's end

Au revoir les enfants

Philip Kemp

'Do you realise,' muses the 12-year-old Julien Quentin, rapt in the entranced solipsism of early adolescence, 'that there'll never be another 17 January 1944? Never ever? I'm the only one who thinks about death at the college. It's incredible.' As the date implies, he could hardly be more wrong. Many of those around him are thinking about death, and in far less theoretical terms.

The moment of adolescent crisis, the point at which the adult world, in all its messy ambiguity, drives in upon, and disrupts, childhood certitudes, has long fascinated Louis Malle. From *Zazie* (who turned the tables with some disruption of her own), through *Le Souffle au coeur*, *Lacombe Lucien*, *Black Moon* and *Pretty Baby*, his young protagonists have found themselves confronted with a world that operates according to no rules they've been led to expect. With *Au revoir les enfants* (Curzon) Malle homes in on the autobiographical reference-point of this theme, the moment that 'may well have determined

my vocation as a film-maker,' when, aged eleven, he watched a Gestapo official enter the classroom of his Fontainebleau school and summon a fellow pupil by an unfamiliar, Jewish name. The film, a 're-invention of the past,' traces the wary, prickly friendship between Julien, Malle's surrogate, and the Jewish boy, Jean Bonnet (played by Raphaël Fejtö with the raw, wounded stare of the young Kafka).

Malle has brought us here, or hereabouts, before. The betrayal of Bonnet comes through the resentment of a Lacombe Lucien in the making—a crippled scullery lad, mocked, abused and eventually dismissed for the black-marketing in which several pupils, Julien among them, have actively colluded. This Joseph, returning in the Gestapo's wake, swaggers uneasily in his flashy new suit, confronting Julien's gaze of appalled realisation. 'Don't start coming all pious—c'est la guerre, mon vieux,' he blusters, while Julien registers his own inescapably shared guilt.

Earlier, the film has skirted the lush territory of *Le Souffle au coeur* in the relationship between Julien and his mother—once again passionate, sexually charged but also (unlike the earlier film) exposed as faintly ludicrous in its hot-house romanticism. Already in the

opening separation scene, set (where else?) on a railway station, Malle slyly subverts the tone as the pair luxuriate in melodramatic cliché, with Julien's Byronic angst ('I'll be miserable. I hate you!') capped by his mother's Fidelio: 'Do you think I like it? I'd like to dress up as a boy and come with you.' This evoked image, at once erotic and ridiculous, self-indulgently unreal, sets up one side of the ironic counterpoint that underpins the film. On the one hand, Julien's smugly moneyed background, politics sampled *à la mode* ('But nobody's a Pétainiste any more!' protests Mme Quentin, with the pique of one accused of favouring last season's hemline); and against this, the stark actuality of the terror endured by Bonnet, for whom no luxury of choice exists—parents vanished or arrested, probably dead, and every passing German soldier a source of anguish.

The film's moral centre—unexpectedly enough from the director of *Viva Maria*, though it's worth recalling that Malle was once Bresson's assistant—resides in a priest, the school's director, Father Jean (Philippe Morier-Genoud, conveying fierce compassion beneath an aspect of bony austerity). His are the two crucial decisions: first, to harbour Bonnet and two other Jewish boys under false names; and second, to sack Joseph while not expelling, out of consideration for their parents, his accomplices among the pupils—a discrimination whose inequity causes him evident pain. A figure of awkward integrity, he preaches to the assembled affluent parents a diatribe against the callousness of the rich and laconically dismisses Julien's professed interest in the priesthood: 'I don't think you've any vocation. Anyway, it's a rotten job.'

Two vividly contrasted scenes—one dark, one light—evoke the murky moral cross-currents of the period. A game of Treasure Hunt leaves the two boys lost together in the forest, with night falling and gaunt rocks looming like primeval wood-spirits. 'Are there wolves?' inquires Bonnet nervously. But here in the twilight, the dangers are illusory. All that appears is a solitary wild boar, trotting hastily off into the bushes. Even the German soldiers whom they encounter, menacingly silhouetted in steel helmets, prove a lot less than monstrous, wrapping the boys solicitously in a blanket and wistfully trying to establish common ground ('We Bavarians are Catholics too').

A few days later, in the genteel ambience of a restaurant where Mme Quentin takes Julien, his elder brother François, and Bonnet to lunch, the real monsters manifest themselves. A group of French Fascist militia, dangerous buffoons in fat, floppy berets, arrive to harass a dignified old Jew, demanding his instant ejection. Commotion, pro and con, among the other clientele; one plump, over-dressed woman shouts, 'Send the

Jews to Moscow!' The contretemps is ended when a Wehrmacht officer, under whose admiring glances Mme Quentin has been preening, objects to having his lunch disturbed and drives the militia ignominiously from the room. 'He only did it to impress you,' François observes to his mother. 'Are we Jewish?' Julien inquires ingenuously. 'Certainly not!' she exclaims; then, catching herself, 'Not that I've anything against Jews . . . except that Socialist, Blum. They can hang him.'

These events are doubly refracted to us: through Bonnet's apprehensive gaze, and also through Julien's intrigued scrutiny both of the events and of his friend's reactions, as it gradually impinges on him what it means to be another person, and a Jewish person at that. In Malle's sympathetic portrayal, Julien rings wholly true as a creature poised on the final brink of childhood, agitated by contrary impulses—touchy, curious, veering unpredictably from cruelty to kindness, savouring the erotic passages in *The Arabian Nights* and still prone to bed-wetting. Gaspard Manesse (a non-professional like all the younger cast-members) inhabits his role with total conviction. Around him Malle skilfully recreates the rhythms and petty details of boarding-school life of the period: the unappetising food, the welcome break of an air-raid, stilt-battles in the playground, the history teacher (a First World War veteran) marking Allied advances with flags on a map. And a film show, Chaplin's *The Immigrant*, rapturously received by staff and pupils alike, of which one sequence acquires unwonted poignancy: as the steerage passengers, stock ghetto types in beards and headscarves, are roped off on deck like cattle, misgivings temper the laughter on a few watching faces.

Just occasionally, the film verges on stereotype; as in *Lacombe Lucien*, Jewishness equals cultural superiority. Bonnet must excel not only academically but also musically, delighting the pretty young piano teacher with his sensitive Schubert. This can be forgiven, though, for the moment of joyous complicity when, alone with Julien during an air-raid while everyone else has retreated to the shelter, he leads his friend in an exuberant burst of four-handed boogie-woogie.

Given such moments, *Au revoir les enfants*—for all its tragic subject matter and elegiac finale—is anything but depressing. In the last scene, as the three Jewish boys and Father Jean are led away to their deaths, Bonnet glances back, and Julien raises his hand in timid salute. In that small, affirmative gesture can be read a promise which this film, with its emotional commitment, its richness of incidental detail and the warmth and lucidity of its regard, has now duly fulfilled. □



Yeelen.

The artificial eye

Yeelen/Gilbert Adair

It was, if memory serves, the young and impertinently iconoclastic journalist François Truffaut who walked out of the Cannes festival screening of *Pather Panchali* with the airily blunt comment that 'I don't want to see a film about Indian peasants.' The slight was of course reprehensibly racist and patronising (its arrogance slightly extenuated, however, by the fact that Satyajit Ray was an unknown quantity in 1956). And yet . . . It is surely one of the functions of the critic to, if one may say, *cut through the crap*, the 'crap' in this instance being the idea that European or American cinephiles, when once installed inside an auditorium, become non-racist almost by definition and are as deliriously pleased to be watching a film about the oppression of an Egyptian farming community, say, as one about the machinations of a Wall Street arbitrageur or the framing of a cartoon bunny wabbit. As we all know, even if no one dares to admit it, this is simply not true. Most of us, in fact, are still, like Truffaut in the 1950s, not tremendously keen on films about Indian (or African or Chinese or Latin American) peasants. What, then, makes it so pleasurable to report on Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* (Artificial Eye) is not merely that it is a masterpiece, the most beautiful film ever to have emerged out of Africa, but also that it happens to be the very first in the history of that continent's cinema for which absolutely no allowance, of whichever order, needs be made.

The Bambara word 'yeelen' has been translated as 'brightness' or 'light'; and the film's narrative (whose mythico-tragic, crypto-Oedipal resonances can

claim an unexpected kinship with those of certain Hollywood mega-hits of recent years) is concerned not with an elemental conflict between the forces of light and darkness but with two violently opposed and irreconcilable incarnations of the former. We are, here, in *lightest* Africa.

A young tribesman (with the deep, limpid eyes, slender figure and long, long legs of the Bambara people in what is now Mali) has reached the age when he may be entrusted with the shamanic lore of his ancestors. His aged mother having forewarned him of the perils he will encounter, this black Parsifal sets forth on an initiatory peregrination, in the course of which he will naturally be tested by the ordeals and humiliations traditional to quest fictions. Empowered, for instance, with the necromantic properties invested in an ornately carved and sceptred wooden panel, named the Wing of Koré, he delivers his own people's immemorial enemies, the Peuls, from a raiding party; later, though, commissioned by the Peul chieftain to cure his wife's barrenness, he sleeps with her and is compelled to confess his misdeed: 'My penis betrayed me,' he penitently owns up with hung head and charming candour. Finally—and this, too, is a convention of such fictions—his journey's end is revealed to coincide with its point of departure: if he was exiled from his mother's home, it was that he might escape the wrath of his father, who has refused to acknowledge him as his equal. In an extraordinary climactic scene the two generations confront each other in a mortal combat of light against light that is not a million light years distant (or is,

perhaps, a million light years distant) from the duel of laser beams fought by Luke Skywalker and his father Darth Vader.

Should that make *Yeelen* sound all too like some folksy tribal romance, complete with spells, bewitchments, amulets, fetishes and burning bushes, it should be said that no precis can do justice to the film's astonishing virtuosity and sophistication—in a word, its artifice. Artifice of texture (the colour cinematography, in startling contrast to the raw granularity familiar from certain miserabilist Third World films and which paradoxically obscures the very images it has generated, conjures up the Malian landscape through a rich and sensual palette of yellows, greens and scorched-earth ochres); of imagery (one recalls, among others, a shot of the hero's mother standing knee-deep in

spongy marshland, silhouetted against a mauve sunset and ritualistically baptising herself in milk); and of effect (the special effects—a weirdly backwards-trotting dog, an occult pestle, the Kolonnkalani, which zeroes in on its targets like an Exocet missile—are not, by western standards, 'good' but they are truly magical). Cissé's artifice, moreover, has nothing in common with that practised by a Beineix or a Besson, who endeavour to dazzle the spectator in an exclusively literal, ocular sense by fragmenting each shot into as many brilliant, eye-jazzing surfaces as it can decently compass: mirrors, blazing automobile headlamps, shiny aluminium 'design' furniture. Here, given the film's paltry budget and natural locations, the dazzle is purely one of *mise en scène*.

Yeelen concludes with the end and regeneration of the world—which is to

say, the world as understood by the Bambarans and the Peuls. As father and son are simultaneously dissolved in the light that emanates from their respective doomsday machines, a naked infant scrabbles in the desert and uncovers two eggs, enormous and pearly white like the pupil-less eyes of some blind giant interred in the sand. And if I have already cited *Star Wars*, the film that Cissé's may most appropriately be likened to is *2001*, with its desert, its rockets, its lethal but also revivifying monolith and, ultimately, its stargirl.

Whatever its strictly science-fiction connotations in 1968—when Kubrick's film was made—2001 is currently only thirteen years off; so that the 'future' of which *Yeelen* constitutes the gorgeous and breathtaking dawn may well be that of a whole new generation in African cinema. □

Year of the Leopard

The Sicilian/Alan Stanbrook

Oddly enough, Michael Cimino's *The Sicilian* (Fox), which hardly sets foot outside the *mezzogiorno*, is as much about America as about Sicily. Salvatore Giuliano, the bandit who was shot to death on 5 July 1950 and whose story Cimino tells, was a member of the Separatist Movement from 1943 and campaigned for the island to be taken over by President Truman as the 49th state of America. An impractical, wildly romantic notion, of course, but because it was Giuliano who was advocating it, the entrenched powers of the church, the state, the aristocracy and the Mafia had reason to fear it. A Robin Hood figure to the poor and the downtrodden, Giuliano might have swung it if he'd been able to mount the referendum he wanted. Hence, perhaps, his violent end.

Cimino's film, though adapted by Steve Shagan (and Gore Vidal?) from the Mario Puzo novel, completely rejects the conceit of integrating the story of Giuliano with that of the fictional Corleone family out of *The Godfather*. Instead, it dovetails with the concerns of Cimino's other movies. It contrasts, for example, the idea of America as a promised land, a haven for the have-nots, with the old world where nothing changes. We know from *Heaven's Gate* how illusory that ideal proved in practice, but in *The Sicilian* we see it in full flower. It is part of Cimino's continuing quest to define what it means to be an American.

Visually this is one of his most ornate pictures. At times it uncannily resembles *The Leopard*—a likeness that Cimino expressly encourages. It is there in the way Prince Borsa, played by Terence Stamp, observes the world from a telescope like Lampedusa's own

Prince; in the beautiful shot, matched at the beginning of Visconti's film, as the breeze stirs the lace curtain at a bedroom window, and in the whole debate about the possibility of change in Sicily.

The scene of the massacre at Porta della Ginestra—unfairly blamed, according to the script, on Giuliano—is a formidable set-piece, dominated by a mass of waving red flags. And there's a scene by the harbour, shot almost at sunrise, as Giuliano telephones his wife for the last time that eloquently expresses the melancholy and regret for a

The Sicilian:
Christopher Lambert and Giulia Boschi.



dream turned sour that are at the heart of the picture. Here, as in *Year of the Dragon*, cameraman Alex Thomson does Cimino proud.

As a director, Cimino arouses strong feelings, usually of antipathy, because he operates quite outside the familiar Anglo-Saxon bounds of good taste and restraint. Francesco Rosi's earlier account of Giuliano's life—grainy, sober, impeccably realistic and just a mite worthy—comes with the kind of credentials that go through almost on the nod in Britain.

Cimino's work is much more dangerous. It is romantic, operatic and often has the nerve to go too far. There are elements in *The Sicilian* that are frankly absurd. Notwithstanding Joss Ackland's magisterial mafioso chief, there is serious miscasting here. Christopher Lambert as Giuliano never sounds as convincing as he looks, and there are even less persuasive performances at the fringe, especially Barbara Sukowa's hysterical duchess and Terence Stamp's cockney prince. These are spectacularly misconceived roles, leaving the film an easy target for ridicule.

Look beyond the shortcomings, though, and you discover a work with ambitions to which the average picture does not even aspire. There is a powerful sense of destiny overhanging Cimino's film. He has always favoured the use of dramatic echoes. They are what give his films resonance. Here there is a striking recurring image of a bird circling in the sky, like fate waiting to swoop, and incidents that mysteriously match and complement each other. In the film, for instance, history twice turns on the fact that a pistol fails to fire. With coincidences like that, can the world really be a random walk?

Cimino's Salvatore Giuliano is not just a legend but a full-blown tragic figure. His generosity to the poor and his grandiose hopes for Sicily are

continually undercut by pride and delusions of grandeur. He sees Alexander the Great as his pacemaker and seeks 'all the credit' when *Life* magazine features him on its cover. In time he even comes to believe the would-be messianic strain in his character. 'What are you going to do?' someone asks, and quick as a flash, he answers, 'Save the world. What else?'

Hubris and retribution are themes with which the workaday Hollywood epic seldom flirts. Indeed, they are so uncommon that the film's initial critics completely overlooked them, yet the matrix—the notion of a great man fatally flawed—is the same as Shakespeare's. Cimino leaves many critics uneasy because, even if he cannot always carry it off, he is prepared to go for broke in a way that no other contemporary Hollywood film-maker quite has the courage to do. □

Run rabbit

Who Framed Roger Rabbit

John Pym

Hollywood, 1947. Roger Rabbit is a foolish 'Toon'. He lives with the other Toons—Goofy, the Dwarfs, the three Blue Birds, the whole gang, as far as one can judge—in 'Toontown', a ghetto into which real folk only reluctantly venture. The Toons are a sort of despised ethnic minority: feckless, unpredictable, alien. In the real world, the world of you and me, where one is liable to glimpse the immortal Dumbo floating past the office window, humanity goes about its customary business: film studios are swallowed up; private eyes are down on their luck; barmaids wait patiently for their men.

Who Framed Roger Rabbit (Warners) proposes a fantastical but simple notion, that cartoon characters are no more than actors who walk offset at the end of a day's work. The success of the film, the live action directed by Roger Zemeckis and the animation by Richard Williams, springs principally from two sources: the gusto with which the performers, notably Bob Hoskins, as detective Eddie Valiant, interact with the Toons, and the seamless with which the live action and animation are integrated.

The picture opens with a delightful cartoon which, in pace and inventiveness, seems to assert that while the old masters to whom the sequence pays tribute were good, their pupils are equally adept. Roger—popeyed, long-eared and with a foolish spotted bowtie—babysits an infant who soon makes a break from his playpen. The kitchen into which Baby Herman crawls turns out to be a Vietnam jungle of booby traps for the anxious rabbit who

scuttles after him. The disasters reach a crescendo, but then an offscreen voice calls a halt, the camera pulls back and the cartoon kitchen is revealed to be a workaday set. Herman, despite his nappy and kiss curl, is an irascible pro—a miniature Mr Magoo—who promptly demands a cigar. Roger himself, it turns out, is a highly-strung crybaby.

The speed and cunning with which the movie's premise is established allows no time for doubts, and the convention once established is readily accepted. From then on, the two worlds intermingle with an easy, unostentatious fluidity. At one point, Eddie and the Rabbit find themselves handcuffed together; the bad hats arrive and Roger is plunged for safety into Eddie's washing-up water. At another, still handcuffed to his protector, the rabbit buffets away under the private eye's trenchcoat. Not spectacular perhaps, but singularly arresting.

Acting with Toons demands special caution, and in this respect Hoskins pitches his performance dead right. He treats the rabbit like a spoilt, fractious child (in short, like an actor), but never makes the mistake of trying to upstage him. Christopher Lloyd, who plays the villain, Judge Doom, is an equally accomplished character actor (he was the boffin in Zemeckis' previous fantasy, *Back to the Future*): his speciality, however, is wide-eyed crazies, not psychopaths but superannuated hippies who are now themselves a bona fide species of likeable cartoon characters. In their different registers, both actors have the temperament to act with animated creatures; they also have the

resilience to stand up to their anarchic versatility.

Roger Rabbit's weakness is its plot, a somewhat ponderous attempt to conjure up the spirit of postwar Hollywood detective stories. Most adults don't have the patience to untangle the plot of *The Big Sleep*, and one cannot imagine many seven-year-olds having much patience with this one. Studio scuttlebutt has it that Roger's wife Jessica is playing around (the rabbit bursts into floods of tears); and the next thing we know the silly creature has been framed for the murder of his producer's rival. After much disentanglement, it transpires that all the trouble has been caused by Judge Doom, who wants to take over Toontown and dunk its residents in a patented concoction known as 'The Dip', an acid bath for Toons, whose bump-tiousness stems, it seems, partly from their former indestructibility.

The atmosphere of dog-eared Hollywood is nicely caught, as is the now discredited notion of the blow-torch effect of the old-fashioned vamp. In a nightclub, Eddie practically falls off his stool at the approach of the serpentine Jessica, while at his shoulder, in a beautiful touch, little Betty Boop looks on in wonder. Still, Jessica notwithstanding, the main attraction is Hoskins and the exasperating rabbit, and on the whole they do not disappoint. Roger is a creature fully formed: a chatterbox, a coward, a hopeless joker who will do anything for a laugh. He cannot hold his liquor, it literally blows the top of his head off—though on one occasion, like Popeye's spinach, it saves his life. But to reveal why would altogether spoil the fun. □

Who Framed Roger Rabbit: Baby Herman and Bob Hoskins (Eddie Valiant).



Letters

CORRESPONDANCE

by François Truffaut

edited by G. Jacot and
C. de Givray
Hatier, Paris

LE PLAISIR DES YEUX

by François Truffaut

Cahiers du Cinéma

It is now four years since François Truffaut died and the memorabilia is flowing off the presses. The most impressive—at least in volume—is the recent edition of his correspondence, more than six hundred pages spanning some forty years of activity, twenty-three films and, it should not be forgotten, a considerable literary output.

This is, of course, far from being a complete edition of Truffaut's letters. It is primarily the record of his professional life and, to a degree, his youth. Two long series of letters, both equally fascinating, are addressed to Robert Lachenay and Helen Scott, respectively his childhood friend and accomplice with whom he remained on excellent terms, and the Director of the French Film Office in New York who set up Truffaut's celebrated interviews with Hitchcock and who became his firm friend and unofficial American agent.

The letters to Lachenay are moving, and they show how little Truffaut retrospectively exaggerated of the material and emotional poverty of his childhood, how much he detested the army and what an ardent bibliophile and voracious reader he was. Indeed, one letter of January 1951 owns up to having sold all his own and Lachenay's books to pay a debt to the latter's grandmother, and therefore to having joined up for three years in Indochina in order to pay Lachenay back. 'I doubt it,' is the manuscript note by Lachenay on the letter.

Here, too, we find the famous letter to Rohmer in which Truffaut demands a testimonial in order to obtain promotion to the editorial staff of the army newspaper and so avoid being sent to Vietnam. By contrast, there is nothing of the correspondence, which must certainly have existed, between Truffaut and his principal mentor André Bazin, and the letters are extraordinarily discreet about the girls François was pursuing at the time, who are generally designated by their initials.

The reader is not helped by the editors on this score. Their approach is semi-academic—

which is to say the critical apparatus is helpful but incomplete, good at identifying people, much less good on books and films—and they say nothing of the principles which have informed their selection, what other letters exist and what they were unable or unwilling to publish.

Much of the volume is given over to exchanges with producers or critics, including such American luminaries as Jonathan Rosenbaum and Richard Roud. Indeed, the latter is referred to as belonging, along with Susan Sontag and Bertolucci, to the 'designer left', which does not stop Truffaut finishing by addressing him with the familiar 'tu'. But there are also some statements of principle which suggest that, whatever the reputation of the film-maker, Truffaut the man possessed considerable integrity.

Of particular interest is a long letter to Godard, written in 1973 in response to a provocative mis-sive from Godard (also printed), in which Truffaut accuses his former colleague of moral blackmail, posturing, insincerity, in his political statements and a complete failure to respect people more vulnerable than himself such as Jean-Pierre Léaud and Janine Bazin.

Another, to the critic Jean-Louis Bory, who had accused Truffaut of having become 'part of the system', painstakingly refutes any notion that he might have 'sold out', points out the number of projects he has turned down (*Life of Scott and Zelda*, *Bonnie and Clyde* [sic]), admits that *Domicile Conjugal* is a 'petit bourgeois' film made in an attempt to capitalise on the success of *Baisers Volés*, and points out how variable and 'unsystematic' his successes have been. Naturally, this was before *Le Dernier Métro*.

However incomplete it may be, this selection of Truffaut's correspondence is therefore both a fascinating guide through the French film industry and a delight to read since Truffaut, though always excessively modest about his literary talents, was a born writer. This may explain why, although in interviews he sometimes comes across as too non-committal or too reticent, refusing to make political statements and refusing to generalise, in his own essays he can be mordant and brilliantly perceptive. *Le Plaisir des Yeux* (a companion volume to *Les Films de ma Vie*) contains pieces that are as fresh and stimulating as the day they were first published.

Here are reprinted some famous polemics—'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français', 'Les Sept Péchés capitaux de la

critique', 'Clouzot au travail ou le règne de la terreur'—which have lost none of their verve, alongside tributes to film-makers Truffaut did admire such as Renoir or Rossellini. Here too, finally, are some portraits, from this man who loved women, of the actresses he admired and worked with—Fanny Ardant, Julie Christie, Catherine Deneuve, Françoise Dorléac, Bernadette Lafont and Jeanne Moreau. Paradoxically, the pieces are so specific in the way they describe the particular qualities of each actress that they end up being more intimate than Truffaut's letters.

Finally—but the years to come will bring much more—the catalogue of an exhibition of film posters currently on show in Paris entitled *Les Quatre Cents Couples de François Truffaut* (Cahiers du 7e Art). The exhibition itself is of little interest, but the accompanying *plaque* is packed with fascinating material including interviews with Marcel Barbert, financial director of Les Films du Carrosse, Suzanne Schiffman and Claude Miller, as well as outlines of two projects which Truffaut did not live to make. What is needed now is an adequate biography.

JILL FORBES

Intimacies

A LIFE

by Elia Kazan

André Deutsch/£17.95

Elia Kazan tells us in the course of this autobiography that of the films he has directed *America, America* is the one that means most to him, but elsewhere says that his favourite last reel is that of *Splendor in the Grass*, because of 'its bittersweet ambivalence'. If in a sense this doorstopper, 848-page volume represents a sequel to the former film by way of exploring the traumas and triumphs of immigrant assimilation, there is no doubt that ambivalence underpins it, in a mood that is sometimes bittersweet, sometimes sour, always highly charged. 'The only good basis for a film or play,' Kazan writes early on, 'is a central character who is split,' and on that score he qualifies unreservedly to be the central player in his own drama.

Kazan came to America in early childhood, the son of an Anatolian rug dealer, and describes growing up lonely and

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BOOK REVIEWS

insecure, fearful of a father who scorned his lack of inclination or aptitude for business. Before gravitating, seemingly almost by accident, towards the theatre, he worked his way through Williams College, and developed a near-obsessive rancour against the party-going WASP girls there who contrived to look through him. Not long afterwards, he turned the tables by marrying the daughter of a Social Register family; the marriage, which bore four children, lasted until his wife's death in 1964, but at the extraordinary cost to her of Kazan's compulsive infidelities, his unabashed desire to combine domestic stability with a sort of sexual piracy. Kazan makes no bones about 'the guilt I've carried all my days', yet is still prepared to maintain: 'My "womanising" saved my life . . . saved me from drying up.'

He characterises this philandering as a continuing revenge on the college girls who endorsed his early outcast state, and even says that he was drawn to Barbara Loden, a mistress who was to become his second wife, because she reminded him of the wealthy Williams students. This ambiguity, allied to a kind of vengefulness, seems to permeate his life at all levels.

His preoccupation with, and frequent celebration of, the contradictory extends beyond himself: he offers a sardonically witty account of Clifford Odets' vicissitudes in endeavouring to find a suitably 'peasant' partner, climaxing in his deathbed proposal to 'a woman as far from a peasant as can be imagined—his own psychoanalyst.' And it certainly goes beyond the domain of sex. He writes of Sam Spiegel that he 'sometimes seemed like a cheap bully . . . At other times Sam was a most intelligent and cultured man. Which was he? Both.' He even, albeit with a retrospective astonishment, cites a contemporary diary entry in which he speaks of his espousal of the Communist Party in the early 1930s as a gesture of vengeance for the way that the Wall Street crash had damaged the fortunes of his unloved and staunchly capitalist father.

Some twenty years on, of course, Kazan would name some of his erstwhile comrades as a friendly witness before HUAC. Again he cites a contemporary diary: 'I'd hated the Communists for many years and didn't feel right about giving up my career to defend them . . . I would give up my film career in the interests of defending something I believed in, but not this.' Not long afterwards, amid the backlash of reaction to his decision to testify, came *On the Waterfront*, arguably his most impressive

and most powerful picture.

Kazan may tend to underplay the significance of genre factors in the film's overall effect, as in their different way do its detractors, but his account of the details of its production is invaluable. (On the taxicab scene between Brando and Steiger: 'If the characters are going right, to begin to talk about motivation and so forth may result in the actors becoming concerned with satisfying you instead of playing the scene.') And rambling though it sometimes is, this book bristles throughout with professional insights, from the hardship of working with James Dean, who 'had no technique to speak of' and on occasion had to be plied with chianti to come up with the goods, to a divertingly self-deprecatory account of his surrender to the Metro house style for the otiose *Sea of Grass*: even the horses 'looked as though they ate at the MGM commissary'.

What in a wider sense *A Life* imparts, and in this respect it echoes Ingmar Bergman's recent and less satisfactory memoirs, is a startling capacity—or is it need?—for emotional crisis. Kazan's credo seems to be that of the instinctive artist. 'The best pieces of writing for the theatre I've known,' he writes, alluding to *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman*, 'are complete at birth. The first draft had it.' And the most memorable of actors' performances 'give you pieces of their lives' and make the spectator 'witness to a final intimacy. In the company of these performers you should not feel safe.' You do not always feel any too safe reading this book, but you are certainly aware of being exposed to some disconcerting currents of intimacy.

TIM PULLEINE

Love's labours

OZU AND THE POETICS OF CINEMA

by David Bordwell

BFI, Princeton University
Press/£35, (paper) £15

The films of Yasujiro Ozu (1903–63) are by common consent among the most exquisite in cinema. Yet in comparison with directors like Kurosawa and Mizoguchi his range of subject matter sometimes seems constricted: quiet domestic dramas involving parents and children, played out in front of static or quasi-static camera set-ups, often with the same actors, and often with confusingly similar

titles: *Early Spring, Early Summer, Late Autumn, An Autumn Afternoon*.

Although in a certain sense the least well known of the three great Japanese directors, Ozu's fame became assured after the international success of *Tokyo Story* (1953). In his lifetime and subsequently he has been the subject of a fair amount of intelligent appreciation in the West, ranging from Donald Richie, with a well-received book in 1974, to Wim Wenders, whose film *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) pays explicit and moving homage to the master.

David Bordwell's book is the most minutely detailed and exhaustive study to date in English, and is plainly, in the best sense, a labour of love. (He tells us in the preface that he has been writing it since 1975. Other books have come out in the meantime: on Dreyer, and on narrative cinema.) It makes up a large volume, 400 pages, divided into two parts. In the first, Bordwell elaborates a systematic 'poetics', ultimately derived, it seems, from the Russian-formalist model of Shklovsky, anatomising Ozu's style, yet intelligently open (with qualifications I will cite in a moment) to social, national and biographical influences.

In the second part, Bordwell works through the extant films individually—31 out of a total of 53—giving plot summaries, comments and criticism. The book may either be read straight through or dipped into, like an encyclopedia, after returning from individual movies.

Paradoxically, it is the size of the book coupled with its formidable learning that may cause most initial trouble to its intended readership. I think it was Nietzsche who said (apropos German metaphysics) that truth should be captured by stealth. Bordwell is actually a rather witty writer, his style notably *unHegelian*. His American artisan's voice avoids obfuscation even in the midst of elaborately philosophical reflection. A complicated systematics is expounded in robust plain English. When he doesn't agree with a previous interpreter (such as Noël Burch), he will say so with rigour, but civilly.

The massiveness of Bordwell's endeavour, however, gives an overall effect that is curiously positivistic. The effort to 'place' Ozu so definitively appears to involve a retrospective determinism. A lingering academic Marxism governs Bordwell's reluctance to find space for contingent individual genius. Biography is not expelled (as it is with the semiologists), but Bordwell is suspicious of it. A less theoretical work would

have been more generous to speculation.

Having said this, I must add that many of the discriminations Bordwell does make are provocative and fascinating. He examines in detail the vexed question of Ozu's 'Japaneseness', showing, through well-researched and illustrated examples, precisely how complicated (or 'imbricated') was the dialogue between East and West in the 1920s and early 1930s, when Ozu set out on his artistic path.

Bordwell is keen to make Ozu less metaphysical than some of his western admirers such as Paul Schrader have imagined him, rescuing him from the inscrutable otherness of Zen culture in order to pitch his origins in the vicinity of Hollywood and popular street culture. The writing here is often brilliant and, in general, the book gives an extremely vivid sense of the richness and variety of Ozu's early career up to the end of the war, bringing in many films that are rarely seen or discussed.

Bordwell established his credentials as an historian and philosopher, but I wonder if he is yet a perfect critic. The summary of films in the second half is occasionally disappointing. The overall thought governing the book is impressive; but the emotional centre of Ozu's films—their exquisite moral didacticism—seems often subtly missed in Bordwell's readings, which are on the whole, in the modern way, too ideologically cautious about the possibility of arriving at universal truth.

There is insufficient space in this review to give examples, but in general Bordwell, I think, doesn't pause sufficiently where the films themselves pause, at moments of tears and sublime moral reckoning. Ozu's cinema illuminates with supreme delicacy the connection between goodness and beauty as it expresses itself across certain wonderful human faces, mainly (but not exclusively) the faces of women. The vocabulary needed to bring out this aesthetic-moral schema shouldn't arrest itself at some hackneyed opposition between docility and rebellion.

Bordwell, for some reason, wishes to rescue Ozu from the charge of 'conservatism', but I think this is a factitious anxiety. Aren't the truths of life conservative, almost by definition? One can't intelligently encounter Ozu without seeing that pride, love, modesty and self-sacrifice make up, in his cinema, a litany of virtues. Most of us, most of the time, are selfish and inconsistent. Ozu's films recognise this too, which gives them their tenderly humorous tone, as well as their enduring pathos.

MARK LE FANU

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MIFF

SIR,—May I ask you to print as a matter of record, and as a correction to the comments made in the article 'Easterners' (Summer, 1988), the following facts about the Manila International Film Festival. This event was never simply 'Imelda Marcos' short-lived festival'. Short-lived, yes, for tragic reasons needing no comment: but Mrs Marcos, while patron, played no executive role in the festival's organisation or content. This was done by John Litton and (before her death) Betty Benitez, advised internationally by (among others) Guglielmo Biraghi, Mel Tobias (Hong Kong), Jean Touzet (former Cannes secretary-general), Mary Godhban (Cairo) and myself.

The quality of the jury in, say, 1982, reflects the festival's standing and cultural openness: Satyajit Ray (chairman), Luis Gasca (San Sebastian festival director), Mme Kawakita, Zsolt Kezdi-Kovacs, Manuel De Leon (Philippines producer), Michael Levy (CBS), Delbert Mann, Kirill Raslogov (USSR film critic) and David Robinson. In that year, over 500,000 people attended the screenings; \$US20m worth of business was done in the film market; 1,090 media representatives were present; and 416 films were screened. The selection drew praise from all over the world and was certainly Asia's largest and most representative film event.

Concerning the year 1986, when, it is true, Mrs Marcos took the initiative in abolishing censorship for all films screened under festival auspices, thereby incurring the Roman Catholic hierarchy's outrage, it was not simply about half-a-dozen Filipino-made films (which would have been rated, at most, 'Cert 15' in Britain for their erotic content) which took advantage of the new liberality. Such movies as *Empire of the Senses* and the two Pasolini films *Canterbury Tales* and *Arabian Nights* were also screened.

Though Mr Marcos bowed to Church protest and the uncensored Filipino films were withdrawn from public cinemas after the festival, for quite some time the new Film Center continued to enjoy a privilege of showing all films uncensored. This would surely have, in the long run, only been to the good of those very groups of Filipino film-makers specifically mentioned in 'Easterners'. On my last visit to Manila, several of them told me how much they regretted the passing of the international festival. If there is a chance to revive it—which I think there may be—it is essential that people accept the firm, respectable

and successful foundation established in the early 1980s and resist the political simplifications disseminated in your correspondent's partisan article.

Yours faithfully,
ALEXANDER WALKER
London W9

Easterners

SIR,—I must make a small but important correction to my article about the Filipino film industry. I was misinformed about the state of Ishmael Bernal's health, and I'm happy to say that he is fit, cheerful and working. It is true, however, that he is having great difficulty in persuading producers to let him direct anything but formula melodramas.

I noticed in the same issue that some 'disinformation' had crept into Richard Roud's account from Berlin of Zhang Yimou's Golden Bear winner, *Red Sorghum*. In the first place, Zhang is only 38 years old, and has never been 'director of cinema studies' at the Xi'an Studio; perhaps Mr Roud is confusing him with his producer, Wu Tianming. In the second, the film is not at all autobiographical, but based on two stories by the Shandong writer Mo Yan, and the protagonists are the unseen narrator's grandparents, not his parents. Finally, Mr Roud is right to say that China has the only surviving Technicolor lab in the world, but wrong to attribute the excellence of Gu Changwei's cinematography to it: *Red Sorghum* was shot in Eastmancolor. Sadly, China rarely uses its Technicolor facilities for its own productions; like western producers in an earlier decade, it finds them too expensive to run.

Yours faithfully,
TONY RAYNS
London SW2

Copyright

SIR,—At the risk of proving the truth of David Docherty's assertion that copyright lawyers are the second most boring type of person in the world (who are the first?), may I point out that the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill contains provisions of potentially even greater impact on the cinema industry than those which will establish the *droits morales* of directors? I refer to Part II of the Bill, entitled 'Rights and Performances', which will replace the Performers' Protection Acts 1958-72.

The Performers' Protection Acts make it a criminal offence knowingly to (among other things) make a film of a performance without the written consent of the performers involved or to deal in such films. Due largely to the difficulty of proving the requisite knowledge, prosecutions

under the Acts are unheard of. Furthermore, it was until recently thought that the Acts did not confer a right of action in the civil courts on a performer whose performance was used without consent. In the Peter Sellers case (in which the Sellers estate successfully sued Blake Edwards and United Artists for using out-takes and clips from the first five Pink Panther films to make *The Trail of the Pink Panther*), the Court of Appeal held that the Acts did confer a right of action, but the reasoning is open to some doubt (and thus might be reversed by the House of Lords).

Part II of the Bill will sweep away many of the difficulties and doubts surrounding the Performers' Protection Acts. Criminal prosecutions will be made easier. More importantly, the Bill confers on performers (and on those with whom they have exclusive contracts) what are described as 'performers' rights' actionable in the civil courts. The reason for this terminology and for dealing with the matter in a different Part to Part I, which will replace the Copyright Act 1956, can only, I would suggest, be political. No one should be in any doubt, however, that what Part II effectively does is to give performers their own copyright.

This is revolutionary, though it remains to be seen exactly what the ramifications will be. Performers will be able to sign away their new rights just as any other copyright can be signed away; so the difference may not be great. It is possible, however, that the new rights will provide performers with a bargaining counter that will enable them to improve their lot.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD ARNOLD
Gray's Inn
London WC1

Michael Reeves

SIR,—I am writing a biography of the writer/director Michael Reeves (1944-1969) and would be grateful to hear from anyone who met or worked with him. Letters and photographs would also be much appreciated and returned. Please contact me at P.O. Box 130, London E11 1BP.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN MURRAY

Distant Voices, Still Lives

SIR,—We would like to make a formal apology for the mistake in the credits for the front cover picture from *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (Summer 1988). The actors were in fact Carl Chase and Anny Dyson, not Pete Postlethwaite and Freda Dowie as stated.

BFI PRODUCTION

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

EDWARD BUSCOMBE is Senior Editor in BFI Publishing and has just edited *The BFI Companion to the Western*. . . . TERENCE BUTLER, author of a book about Sam Peckinpah, is at work on a thesis on German cinema. . . . DAVID FRANCIS is Curator of the National Film Archive. . . . PETER HAMES is the author of *The Czechoslovak New Wave*. . . . EDWARD HOTSPUR JOHNSON is a freelance researcher and writer who has recently completed a book on Indian Cinema. . . . DAVID MEEKER is Feature Film Officer of the National Film Archive. . . . DAVID MORGAN is a freelance writer on films based in New Jersey. . . . AUDREY STANTON, one-time secretary to Orson Welles, is now a screenwriter and still lives in Rome.

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ON NOW

●BAGDAD CAFE

(Mainline)

Another of Percy Adlon's engaging miniatures, in which a stolid Bavarian hausfrau, uncereemoniously dumped by her husband while on a tourist trip to America, finds herself stranded at a derelict motel somewhere in the Arizona desert. Forlornly toying with the child's conjuring set she had evidently bought as a gift, she begins to find that magic works—not least on the broken-down artist (Jack Palance) who eagerly homes in on her as a bizarrely overweight but inspiringly desirable muse. It may all be uneasily reminiscent of William Saroyan and his whimsies as the motel blossoms into a wonderland where dreams come true; but it's very sweet and funny for all that, with a string of delightful performances headed by Marianne Sägebrecht, the bounteous baby doll of Adlon's *Sugarbaby*. (C. C. H. Pounder, Christine Kaufmann.)

●THE DECEIVERS

(Enterprise)

William Savage, upright servant of the East India Company, sets out in 1825 in turban and black face to break the Thugs, an ancient brotherhood of bandits who in the name of the goddess Kali strangle unwary travellers. Savage (Pierce Brosnan), newly married to a virginal bride, discovers, however, that he has been well named: by unforced stages he slips into thuggery himself. Drawn from the John Masters novel, itself based on fact, this richly jewelled period-piece is distinguished by a luxuriously sinister depiction of the Thugs (notably by its use of an angelic dancing boy as one of their number), by Ken Adam's designs and by Walter Lassally's photography which has never made Northern India more changelessly serene. The climax is an old-style full-dress cavalry charge, and the most dependable villains are Shashi Kapoor, Saeed Jaffrey and gold-toothed Tariq Yunus. Producer Ismail Merchant, who nursed the project for many years, has written a spirited and occasionally score-settling account of the film's vicissitudes (including his own near-jailing) in *Hullabaloo in Old Jeypore* (Viking). (Keith and Helena Michell; director, Nicholas Meyer.)

●DROWNING BY NUMBERS

(Recorded Releasing)

Suffolk is the locale of Peter Greenaway's new film, but the return to a rural English setting after the European excursions of his last two pictures has done nothing to reverse the increasingly, not to say

excessively, cerebral direction in which he has been heading. Rather the opposite, in fact, since the humanising effect of the central performance in *The Belly of an Architect* is notably absent here. *Drowning* is in outline a bucolic black comedy, but its parade of seductions, murders and mutilations proves merely a pretext, and a frequently incomprehensible one, for a succession of would-be surreal games—literally so when invented sporting enterprises like 'hangman's cricket' are illustrated with wearisome elaboration. Polished camerawork by Sacha Vierny and an inventive score from Michael Nyman only marginally offset the deadening effect of repetitiousness and self-indulgence. (Joan Plowright, Joely Richardson, Juliet Stevenson.)

●MANHUNTER

(Recorded Releasing)

FBI agent William Peterson, a specialist in tracking serial killers, is summoned from retirement to deal with a family-slaughtering madman known as 'The Tooth Fairy'. A chilly, pared-down adaptation of Thomas Harris' outstanding novel *Red Dragon* in Michael Mann's overdrive style, with sparse imagery, state-of-the-art police procedural work, a steady build-up of tension, some very clever clues and a psychologically apt set of performances. Man of the match is Brian Cox as Hannibal Lecter, a former enemy of Peterson, who contrives to be frightening while locked in a maximum-security cell. (Kim Griest, Tom Noonan, Dennis Farina.)

●A WORLD APART

(Palace)

Sumptuously photographed weepie based on the true story of Ruth First, South African journalist and committed ANC supporter. Daughter Shawn Slovo's script recalls the traumatic events of 1963 when her father was forced into hiding and her mother imprisoned and interrogated for two consecutive ninety-day periods. Barbara Hershey's award-winning performance bears testimony to Ruth First's courage and dignity, but the film's heart is the troubled relationship between mother and daughter, driven apart by political necessity. Chris Menges directs with evident sympathy both for his central characters and the African nationalist cause, but the issue is not so much the complexities of South African politics as the business of getting the audience to identify with the victims of apartheid. (Jeroen Krabbe, David Suchet, Linda Mvusi, Albee Lesotho.)

AND GOD CREATED WOMAN

(Vestron)

Roger Vadim's transatlantic 'remake' of his first film bears scant resemblance to its 1956 predecessor: Rebecca De Mornay is a very poor man's BB, and flaccid rock songs outnumber the amorous encounters.

BEETLEJUICE

(Warner)

Trapped in their old white house, two bewildered and not very terrifying spooks (Geena Davis and Alec Baldwin) are forced to conjure the renegade and gloriously manic Betelgeuse (Michael Keaton) in order to oust the unwelcome new tenants. Supernatural hokum of distinguished lineage expertly scripted by Michael McDowell and Warren Skaaren. Whipped along at a cracking pace by director Tim Burton. Outstanding ghoulish-comic effects.

BIG

(Fox)

The best of the current crop of age-switch movies, with a twelve-year-old wishing he were older and winding up as Tom Hanks. Inventive gags, acute observation and some gentle sentiment make this a fine old confection in the fantasy-comedy tradition. (Elizabeth Perkins, Robert Loggia, John Heard; director, Penny Marshall.)

BIG BUSINESS

(Warner)

Two sets of twin sisters, mixed up at birth, grow up to be on opposite sides in a big business v. small town contretemps. Some bright moments, but lack of farcical momentum renders the film more chapter of accidents than latter-day *Comedy of Errors*. (Lily Tomlin, Bette Midler; director, Jim Abrahams.)

BUSTER

(Vestron)

Another of British cinema's attempts to recreate the scandals of the 1950s and 60s as a packaged mix of nostalgia, cheeky comedy and social history. Phil Collins is the Great Train Robber of the title, Julie Walters his wife who complains she can't get steak-and-chips in their Mexican hideaway. Crime doesn't pay... (Director, David Green.)

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

(UIP)

Having spent some fifteen years in the vaults, reputedly because Frank Sinatra was upset by the connection with President Kennedy's assassination, *The Manchurian Candidate* re-emerges as tonic as ever, its satire of the family, politics and the Cold War mind undimmed, and the peculiarity of its paranoid anti-paranoia theme even more evident. (Laurence Harvey, Janet Leigh, Angela Lansbury; director, John Frankenheimer.)

MIDNIGHT RUN

(UIP)

Pleasant, ambling comedy of manners, about a hard-bitten bounty hunter (Robert De Niro), who brings bail-jumpers to book, and his latest charge, Mafia accountant Charles Grodin, who turns out to be a kindly, health-conscious, charity-supporting sort. But the theme of the odd couple getting to know and like each other has a bit too much space (the trans-continental USA) to amble to its predictable conclusion.

(Yaphet Kotto; director, Martin Brest.)

RAMBO III

(Columbia)

Rambo, in Afghanistan, snatches his old CO from the Soviet dungeon in which he has been imprisoned after embarking on a puzzlingly indeterminate mission. The hero's indestructibility, allied to the casual logistics of the staging, makes the proceedings largely uninvolved even at the crudest blood-and-thunder level. (Sylvester Stallone; director, Peter Macdonald.)

RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD, PART II

(Guild)

The brain-eating dead are revived by toxic waste and terrorise a small townload of comic characters. A witch's brew of sequel, parody and remake badly in need of some new ingredients. (Thom Matthews; director, Ken Wiederhorn.)

THE SEVENTH SIGN

(Columbia)

Jürgen Prochnow wanders the Earth unsealing the omens of the Apocalypse, while Demi Moore grows paranoid as she goes through a difficult pregnancy. A millennial thriller that opens promisingly with the redevastation of Sodom. Odd that Fundamentalists should get so heated by Scorsese's flawed, human Christ and ignore this depiction of Jesus as a homicidal lodger. (Michael Biehn; director, Carl Schultz.)

SHAG

(Palace)

Pleasant, unremarkable teenpic, modelled on *Where the Boys Are* and—more cannily—*Dirty Dancing*. Four nice teenage girls spend a 60s weekend at the beach searching for true love, a way out of their Southern backwater and first prize in the shag dance contest. The cast consists almost entirely of relatives. (Annabeth Gish, Page Hannah, Phoebe Cates, Bridget Fonda, Tyrone Power Jr; director, Zelda Barron.)

STAND AND DELIVER

(Warner)

The Blackboard Jungle, Chicago-style, about an enthusiastic teacher who gets his semi-delinquent *barrio* kids so hipped on advanced calculus that they achieve amazing exam grades. A true story, but not exactly persuasive as to how he did it, or about the racial prejudice motif (they're accused of cheating). Good performances, though, and nicely relaxed background detail. (Edward James Olmos; director, Ramon Menendez.)

VIBES

(Columbia)

Mismatched psychics Jeff Goldblum and Cyndi Lauper travel to Ecuador on the trail of ancient mysticism. The leads have a kooky charm, but the film is the poorer for killing off supporting player Peter Falk, whose bright spark performance as a half-apologetic conman gives this comedy adventure a decided lift. (Director, Ken Kwapis.)

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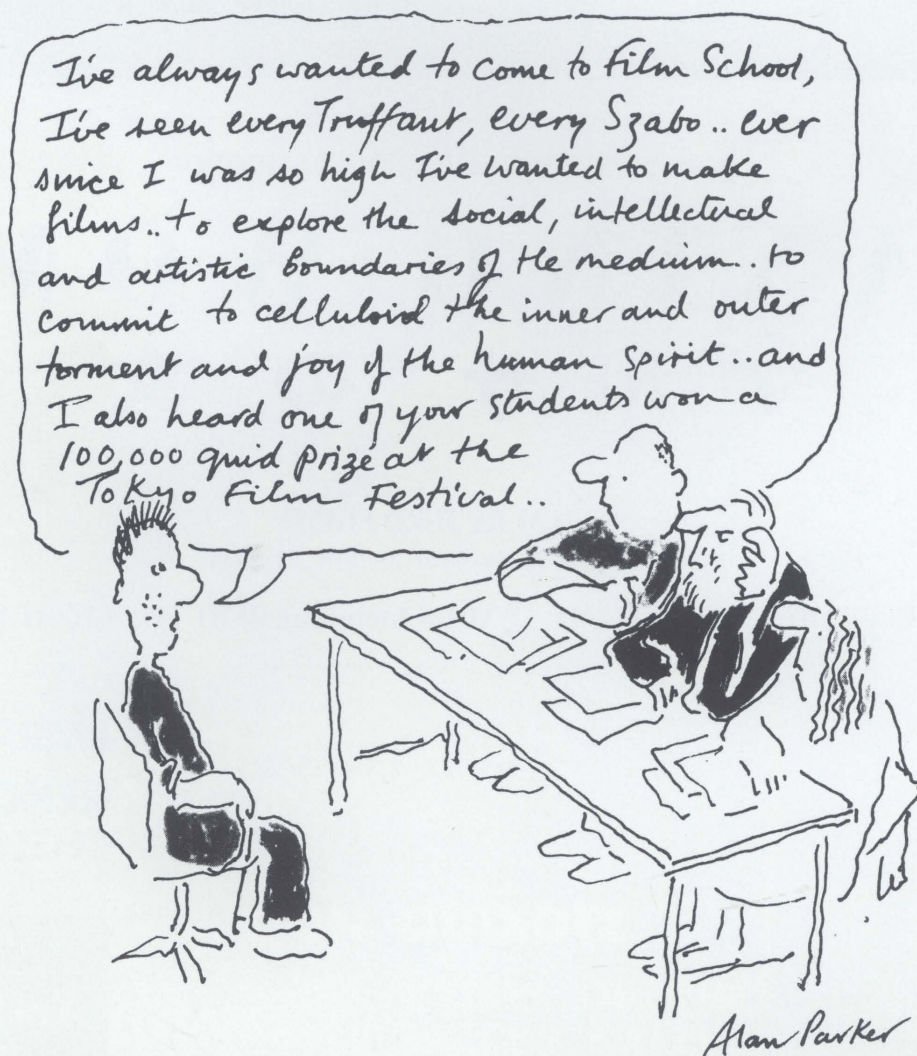
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(Student Applications) Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire.

Tel: Beaconsfield (04946) 78623

Application Deadline 15th January, 1989.

The School is financed jointly by Government and Industry and is fully recognised by ACTT.





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